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BY

R. H. COATS, M.A., B.D.

AUTHOR OF
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" What we have to remind ourselves of is, that the Christ who is to judge the world—both the living and the dead—is the same Jesus of Nazareth who spoke the Sermon on the Mount and the parables of judgment and mercy, and that He does not change His character with the changes in the Church's disposition."

C. Gore, *The Holy Spirit and the Church*, p. 350.

INTRODUCTION

"Sir, we would see Jesus," said certain Greeks on a memorable occasion to one of the Master's disciples in Jerusalem. The words, no doubt, were casually and lightly spoken, yet they gave unconscious utterance to a deeply implanted craving of the human heart. In every age since His coming into the world men have been mysteriously attracted by Jesus Christ. Their conclusions regarding Him have been extremely diverse, yet they have instinctively felt that to be near Him is to be near the fire, and that He indeed has the words of eternal life. If only the veils of time and sense might be removed, if only the distorting lenses of passion and controversy might be laid aside, who would not gladly look unto Jesus, and try to see Him as He really is?

Many influences, however, have tended to obscure Him. The glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ has not infrequently been hidden from the world by gorgeous ceremonies, cold formalities, subtle scholasticisms, and lifeless organisations. Even the means expressly chosen to portray Him have sometimes grievously perverted His true character, and totally misrepresented the first principles of His Gospel. Instead of a living and redeeming Lord, men have been offered a rite, a precept, a syllogism,

a code of rules. Yet ever the soul of the Church has protested against these things, and the humble of heart have plucked, as it were, their leaders by the sleeve, and have said to them pleadingly, " Sirs, we would see *Jesus*."

Few things are more remarkable than the way in which, from time to time, this deep inner craving has been satisfied. Whenever faith has been at a low ebb, and the need for spiritual quickening has been greatest, a St. Francis of Assisi, a Martin Luther, a John Wesley, or a William Carey has appeared, to present afresh some long-neglected aspect of the Christ. In every such awakening we may truly say that " Jesus Himself drew near " to those who yearned for Him. The Church's recurrent simplifications of creed and worship, its oft-repeated renewals of zeal and faith, are evidence of a power, never wholly surrendered, enabling it to recover from every kind of error and sin and folly, and to return once again to the joy and ardour of its first love.

Yet no one of those revivals and simplifications within the Church has ever exactly reproduced the original revelation. There is a subjective element in all seeing, and each successive vision of the Master is inevitably conditioned by the eyes that see it, and by the circumstances in which it is experienced. The Jesus whom Bunyan knew, for example, was not quite the same as the Jesus of Ignatius Loyola. Both differed widely from the Jesus of Rembrandt, of Hegel, of Tolstoy, of John Stuart Mill. We of the present day, like every generation that has gone before us, have our own

peculiar conception of Christ, perhaps also our characteristic bias concerning Him ; for each age tends to interpret Christ in accordance with its own predilections, and to seek His sanction for its favourite ideals.

Nevertheless, amid all these diverse manifestations, we feel there is something that remains constant. Interpretations change ; the Church itself changes in a changing world. Yet Jesus Christ lives on and changes not. Having created the Church to be the organ and vehicle of His self-expression, He continually dwells in it, to judge, restore, animate, extend it, and finally to present it faultless before the Father. In every age Jesus represents the eternal within the temporal, the kernel of truth within the husk of error. However differently He may be interpreted in the course of history, He nevertheless, as revealer of the Father, bringer of salvation, bestower of peace and joy in believing, giver of eternal life to the sinful and sorrow-laden souls that trust Him, remains throughout what He has always been—" Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever."

These considerations suggest a number of interesting and important questions. What is the relation between the Jesus of history and the Christ of experience ? Is the essential Jesus only to be reached by a minute examination of ancient documents, a patient excavation beneath the silt of centuries ? Or is He to be sought everywhere, in all that He has inspired, and not in the earliest sources of the New Testament alone ? Is the Church He created a supplementary organ of His

self-revelation, or is it only the trustee and custodian of a faith once for all delivered to the saints? What place is to be assigned to Scripture, what to tradition, and what to subjective spiritual experience, in the interpretation of Christ? By what test are we to judge whether the various doctrinal and ecclesiastical developments promulgated in His name are legitimate or no? In a perpetually changing church, where is the unchanging Christ assuredly to be found? These are some of the questions which will engage our attention in the present volume. It seeks, humbly and reverently, to apply to the Light of the World the prism of devotional and reflective thought, and so to distinguish some of the many-coloured rays into which the brightness of that pure celestial radiance is broken as it streams upon mankind.

CHAPTER I

THE CHRIST OF SCRIPTURE

THE opening scenes of the ministry of Jesus were enacted in a setting of idyllic loveliness. Galilee in the time of Herod Antipas was a prosperous and fertile province. Situated on a shelving plateau between the snow-white peaks of Hermon on the north and the parched and arid wastes of Judea on the south, it enjoyed a mild and salubrious climate. The landscape was pleasantly diversified into hill and dale, here and there sheltering small villages and hamlets, and affording distant glimpses of a deep blue lake, with many a bright prospect of vineyards and cornfields and meadows carpeted with flowers.

Such a country readily supported a numerous and mixed population. Sowers and fishermen, Pharisees and tax-gatherers, Roman centurions and Greek merchants, mingled with one another in markets and on the highways, diffusing everywhere a spirit of tolerant cosmopolitanism, in marked contrast to the more fanatical temper of Judea to the south. Nature in Galilee was niggardly enough to require from its cultivators hard and persistent labour, and at the same time generous enough to reward them for their toil with abundant harvests and ample opportunities for social intercourse and joyous feasting.

I

It was upon this stage that the Carpenter of Nazareth first made His appearance. Jesus could probably understand the Greek language, but He owed nothing to Plato or to the schools of Alexandria. He was in all respects spiritually of the stock of Abraham, and learned His ethical monotheism from Deuteronomy and Isaiah, His philosophy of history from the Books of Daniel and of Enoch. From the study of the Hebrew Scriptures, and as the result of much brooding over the serene translucent depths of His own soul, Jesus became saturated with the consciousness of God. The conviction was borne in upon Him that the Being so wonderfully manifested in the glories of nature and the history of His chosen people, was now preparing a fuller revelation of Himself in the establishment of a kingdom of love and righteousness ; and that He, Jesus, as the well-beloved Son of the eternal Father, was to be the specially anointed agent of its realisation.

The spiritual intuitions of Jesus were religious rather than metaphysical, and He probably did not speculate on the nature of His union with the Father. In accordance with Hebrew psychology He would think of this as morally conditioned by steadfast obedience on the one hand and the unmeasured outpouring of the Spirit on the other. In any case, Jesus seems not to have regarded Himself as of the same rank as the prophets who went before Him. They, it is true, were authorised messengers of the Most High, but Jesus was conscious of being His

Son, the appointed vicegerent and plenipotentiary of the Father, charged with the task of kindling fire upon the earth and inaugurating a new age in judgment and in salvation. Christ's consciousness of Sonship, that is to say, was even more functional than it was ethical, and it was much more ethical than it was metaphysical.

In giving expression to His consciousness of God, Jesus inevitably employed the language of contemporary eschatology. Though He long kept the matter secret, even from His disciples, He thought of Himself as the Messiah, or Son of Man, divine in origin yet lowly in manifestation, whose task it would be to overthrow Satan and establish God's Kingdom from the clouds of heaven. Doubtless Jesus found the popular ideas inadequate on this subject, and He deeply spiritualised them, especially in the direction of introducing the element of suffering into His conception of the Messiah. Doubtless also we should remember that, like every attempt to express the transcendental in terms of human speech, the apocalyptic language of Jesus should be interpreted symbolically rather than literally. Yet that language gave utterance to a vital spiritual truth which is of permanent value independently of the form of its first expression. It meant that, to Jesus, God and His Kingdom are essentially transcendent and supra-temporal realities, and that the true significance of our present life is to be sought beyond rather than within this life itself. "The Kingdom is just greatness and marvel absolute, the wholly other heavenly thing, set in contrast to the world of here and now, the mysterious

itself in its dual character as awe-compelling yet all-attracting, glimmering in an atmosphere of genuine religious awe." * As such it must not for a moment be confused with our modern humanitarian and evolutionary conceptions of a remote, utopian, largely secular, progressively achieved earthly paradise.

In one sense the Kingdom, as preached by Jesus, was viewed as mystical and already present. It signified in the first instance the unqualified acceptance of the reign of God over the inner life. Yet in the nature of things such a Kingdom must necessarily find its full external embodiment as well. The present gift involved a future task and pointed to an ultimate consummation in the age to come. In the mind of Jesus the time for the divine intervention had already arrived. A crisis had been reached in the history of the world, and the Kingdom of Heaven must forthwith be taken as it were by storm. God was even now preparing the stage for the last great act of the human drama, when an irruption of divine forces should put an end to the old order and introduce the new. In the preaching of Jesus this Kingdom was presented, "directly and emphatically, as not present but future ; not distant, but imminent ; not gradual, but sudden ; not as at all achieved by man, but as simply given by God." †

Yet, though the message of Jesus in its *religious* aspect was transcendental and apocalyptic, in its *ethical* aspect it was largely immanental and prophetic. From the divine side, indeed, the Kingdom was available at once, and in the person of Jesus it was

* R. Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (Eng. Trans.), p. 85.
† F. von Hügel, *Eternal Life*, p. 56.

already present, as His power to work miracles and cast out demons sufficiently attested. Jesus, that is to say, boldly and joyously proclaimed to men the guaranteed, immediate, limitless endorsement by God of a policy of absolute idealism in reliance upon Him, through the practice of holy, patient, and sacrificial love in all the relationships of life. Nevertheless, from the human side, this promise was of necessity morally conditioned by man's response to the offer of the Gospel, and Jesus was genuinely surprised at the poverty of human faith. The Kingdom after all might be held back through unbelief; only very gradually might the consummation be achieved, in accordance with the analogy of seed growing secretly, or yeast slowly leavening a heavy lump of dough.

In any case, whether it came soon or late, the character of the Kingdom was not in doubt, and the expected immediacy of the end only served to bring its essential nature into sharper and clearer relief than ever. In brief, the Kingdom may be defined as "the blissful order of man's perfected relations with God, and with others as His family." * There was nothing to prevent the beginning at least of the establishment of such an order now. It did equal justice to man's other-worldly and to his terrestrial life. On the one hand it meant a negative, almost harsh, world-renouncing ethic. The nearness of the end changed the proportion of all things, threw men back upon absolute and final values, and made nothing worth living for save righteousness and love.

* C.O.P.E.C. Commission Reports, vol. xii., p. 16.

The only thing to do was to repent and to believe the Gospel, living a life of complete detachment from the present world-order, which was passing away. A man might be required to hate his own father and mother, or to sacrifice hand, eye, life itself, for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake, and fortunate he would be if so he won it.

On the other hand, as Walter Pater has admirably pointed out,* Jesus embodied a positive, genial, world-accepting ethic, benign, humanitarian, simply kind, with a Greek-like quality of æsthetic delight in the beauty of the world, a blithe, debonair, sunny cheerfulness, which reflected the goodwill of the eternal Father to the just and the unjust alike. The shortness of the time, and the certainty of love's consummation in the life beyond, made all ills bearable, all effort fruitful, and every little act of kindness to one's neighbour a laying up of treasure in the transcendent realm, where neither moth nor rust can corrupt, and where thieves do not break through to steal.

Jesus, then, took apocalyptic values and transmuted them, through personal and historical values, into eternal, absolute, and universal values. The result was a Gospel which was good news indeed, especially to the sinful, the unfortunate, and the despairing. It freely offered heartsease and peace with God, with full and immediate participation in the blessings of the Messianic Kingdom, to all those who, breaking with worldliness and casting anxiety aside, were prepared, through a radical transformation of their inmost being, to live simply,

* *Marius the Epicurean*, vol. ii., pp. 115–120.

courageously, unselfishly, among men, in childlike reliance upon the heavenly Father's love.

II

The message of Jesus was engagingly commended by His personality. Indeed it was recognised from the beginning that He Himself was even more wonderful than anything He said or did. The virtue that was in Him imparted health to the diseased and life to the paralytic. It overflowed in joyous humour and quiet irony. It streamed upon all sorts and conditions of men in a radiance of irresistible and unwearied love. Yet Jesus was by no means a merely winsome figure. He could be terribly masterful and stern also. There was in Him something 'numinous' and holy which made His own disciples shrink from Him occasionally in amazement and even dread. Jesus gave men rest, yet in the very act He imposed on them a yoke, a burden, and a cross. Such, however, was His air of commanding authority and power, that men gladly left their all to follow Him, and found no difficulty in believing that He was able to subdue even the forces of nature to His will.

The attitude of the new Teacher to already existing parties and institutions soon became manifest. Towards the dominion of mighty Rome Jesus was distantly respectful. The special claims of His own Messianic vocation, as well as the status of the Jewish people under the Empire, forbade His exerting any effective influence upon the social and political conditions of His time. His peaceable and universal soul shrank from the

violent assertion of fanatical nationalism in any form, and He fled from those who would make Him King in a revolutionary sense.

All men noted the difference between Jesus and John the Baptist. John was an ascetic, who withdrew from the society of men, contented himself with rough clothing and a meagre diet, and uttered terrible words of coming judgment. Jesus, on the contrary, was genial and friendly. He mingled freely with men and women of all classes, and obviously liked being asked to supper. Jesus could not have sympathised with the later ascetic dualism which made self-torture an end in itself, condemned the body as the seat of evil, and pessimistically despaired of ever practising holiness under the conditions of ordinary life. Yet He wholly approved of a warm, altruistic, cheerful, unostentatious asceticism, which sternly disciplines the passions of both soul and body in the interests of love and service.

Of the Scribes and Pharisees Jesus complained that in their zeal for the letter of the Mosaic Law, and its subsequent midrashic enlargements, they completely misread the aims and intentions of the divine Lawgiver. For the system of legal righteousness, therefore, which they elaborated, Jesus substituted a direct personal relationship between God and man, of gracious, forgiving love and repentant faith, from which all thought of merit was excluded.

In His attitude to the priestly class Jesus showed no disposition to overturn the hierarchical and ceremonial system which was centred in Jerusalem. Yet, like most of His predecessors in the prophetic succession, He opposed, in the interests of inward-

ness, excessive attention to non-ethical externalism in religion, and stated plainly that the offering of ceremonial worship was vain in the sight of God if it went hand in hand with enmity towards one's brother.

Disappointed in the religious leaders of His day, Jesus turned gladly to the common people. From the oppressed, the weak, the guilty, the unfortunate, He received the welcome which was everywhere denied Him by sanctimonious rectitude and official sophistry. Believing passionately in God's redeeming love for every man, and no less in every man's capacity for loving God, Jesus sought out and sorrowed over the lost, the last, and the least of the Father's children. These were as sheep without a shepherd, sick in need of a physician, and He saw that it was from these, wandering disconsolate along the neglected by-ways of the world, that the ranks of His followers must chiefly be recruited, and the Father's brightly lighted wedding-chamber filled with guests.

Ever and anon, however, Jesus turned from this larger public to the more intimate body of personal disciples such as all rabbis in those days loved to gather round them. One of the marvels of history is the trust reposed by Jesus in those ordinary, unlettered, and often very quarrelsome men. He imparted to them no creed, no test of orthodoxy; He established among them no rigid discipline, no hierarchy of degrees, no form of ecclesiastical organisation. To Peter, indeed, a natural priority was accorded, but it came to be recognised that, in a fellowship where One was Master and all the rest

were brethren, the only ascendancy which could be admitted was pre-eminence in lowliness. Together the disciples constituted a happy spiritual fraternity. Family life was abandoned that they might be free to wander from place to place. Avarice was struck at by the adoption of a common purse. Climatic and economic conditions in Palestine rendered this experiment in communism comparatively easy, and we must not suppose that Jesus herein intended to legislate for future ages.

Partly by esoteric disclosure to this inner circle, and partly by story, parable, aphorism, addressed to the multitude, Jesus unfolded the wealth of His mind and heart. One is impressed by the extreme simplicity and seeming casualness of His teaching. Here are no metaphysical dogmas, no scholastic pedantries, no technical terms. Everything is homely, familiar, vivid, and pictorial. Seeds of thought were freely scattered by the wayside which were afterwards to grow into a veritable jungle of matted theological undergrowth. Beautiful and profound sayings, which all the world now quotes, fell from His lips as He strolled through the cornfields or reclined at the supper-table. To the astonishment of His hearers He drew inspiring lessons regarding God and eternal life from a clucking hen, a bowl of household meal, a lost coin, the frolics of little children.

We do well to linger fondly over the opening Galilean phase of the ministry of Jesus. It is lyrical with hope and joy and full of the enchantment and beauty of romance. Time seems to stand still, transfigured by eternity. The heavenly Father

bends well pleased over His beloved Son. Earth is a paradise ; humanity achieves perfection even as God is perfect ; over all there stretches the tranquil, infinite expanse of the blue sky. Yet clouds are gathering, small indeed at first as a man's hand, which soon will spread themselves over the entire firmament, and whelm the soul of Jesus in darkness and eclipse.

III

Popular in Galilee, Jesus had yet to reckon with Judea. From the beginning the signs were ominous. The new Teacher and His little band were provincials, unversed in the ways of cities, speaking with a country accent, natives of a district little spoken of in Scripture, and from which a prophet was proverbially not to be expected. Moreover, power was in the hands of a wealthy coterie of priests and rulers, who could have nothing in common with the vagabond carpenter-preacher-physician from the north. To them the claim of Jesus to be Son of God was clearly blasphemous, and it provided them with a welcome occasion for accusing Him of high treason before the civil tribunal of Pontius Pilate.

While the respectable religious classes thus increasingly became estranged from Him, Jesus also forfeited the support of the common people. These demanded a wonder-worker for their King, who should give them the material benefits and political leadership they craved. With the spiritual aims and ideals of the true Messiah they had little sympathy.

Behind these earthly ministers and agents who

were gathering from all sides against Him Jesus envisaged the antagonism of a larger conflict. He saw that the hour had come when the supreme battle must be engaged, in the person of the Messiah, for the possession of the souls of men. The cross, it was now clear, must bring all things to a head in a momentous climax. The Prince of Darkness would fill up the measure of the world's iniquity by crucifying the Messiah ; but God would, in some manner at first greatly dark, mightily intervene to vindicate righteousness. Only through suffering could the Son of Man hope to enter upon His glory.

With death in sight Jesus prepared the minds of the disciples for His departure by instituting on their behalf a simple eucharistic meal. He had already approved of baptism as an initiatory rite, introducing believers into the new society, and conferring on them sonship in the approaching transcendental Kingdom. He now appointed a sacramental feast with the same spiritual reference. This simple rite was to undergo many developments in the course of history. Originally, doubtless, it carried with it no mystical suggestion of quasi-physical participation in the divine nature. Neither was it intended as a means of indefinitely prolonging the moral and spiritual sustenance of disciples in this world. Rather, it was to be regarded as a pledge and token of oneness with Christ till He should come in His glory and feast with His own again at the Messianic banquet: " I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."

Calmed and fortified by this fellowship, Jesus

passed from the tranquillity of the upper room to what remained of His eventful tragedy. Our minds recall the sadly familiar scenes—the agony in the garden and the resultant peace, the coming of the torch-bearers, the betrayer's kiss, the revealing cock-crow, the mock trial in secret, the public flagellation, the demand for Barabbas, the sad procession to Golgotha, the erection of the cross, the piercing nails, the rude gambling for a malefactor's garment, the benumbing drug offered and refused, the last great cries of forgiveness, of dereliction, of self-committal to the Father, and then—the sinking of the head in death.

We bow with reverence when we survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died. Its spiritual significance is inexhaustible, its love unfathomable. Such was the labour, such the cost, of redeeming a sinful and sorrow-laden world.*

IV

The disciples' experience of Christ within New Testament times may be briefly indicated.

In the first place we find them possessed by an overwhelming conviction that the Jesus whom men crucified was risen from the dead. No modern scruples regarding any supposed breach of the uniformity of nature interfered with this belief. The resurrection of the righteous was a commonly received article of faith. In the case of Jesus the disciples were fully satisfied, by "many infallible proofs," that the Lord of life had won a complete victory over death.

* See the beautiful section of Pascal's *Thoughts* entitled "The Mystery of Jesus."

There followed inevitably the first article of faith of the nascent Church—" Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Christ." The expression was no doubt closely bound up with the eschatological expectations of current Judaism, from which the early Church did not attempt to break away. What it proclaimed to the world was the belief that Jesus was no mere rabbi or prophet, but was now to be regarded as a heavenly Prince and Saviour, whose claim to Messiahship had through His resurrection been fully vindicated and owned by God. Indeed, Jesus Himself, having consummated His divine dignity by victory over death, now poured forth the power of His risen life, and thus fulfilled, illumined, supplemented, and crowned the somewhat enigmatic earthly ministry.

Following this conviction came an experience of extraordinary release and liberty of spirit. They who gave themselves unreservedly to Christ as Lord became mysteriously conscious of deliverance from the guilt and power of sin. The death of Christ accomplished what no temple sacrifices had ever wholly succeeded in doing, it removed once for all every barrier to acceptance with a holy God, and gave the joy unspeakable of constant, intimate communion with Him through faith.

The inevitable concomitant of this new experience was Christian fellowship. The risen Christ distributed His blessings socially within the Church. While seated at the right hand of God He was nevertheless present, an unseen Friend, wherever two or three were gathered together in His name. Especially at the Lord's Supper were the souls of believers

nourished and refreshed as by the body and blood of Christ. The unity of the Church was further maintained by the sacrament of baptism and by an ever more carefully articulated hierarchical organisation, believed to derive its authority and sanction both from the historical Jesus and from the risen Lord. Of this one spiritual body Christ was Head, and the disciples were the members ; He was the Bridegroom, they the Bride. Theirs the manifold gifts and manifestations of the Spirit ; His the unfailing source from which they came.

Reflection on these experiences involved the gradual formation of a theology calculated to explain them. Such categories of thought as came most immediately to hand were first made use of in this connection. The Old Testament was searched for prophetic anticipations of Him who was to come. New light was flashed on the Suffering Servant in Isaiah and on the regal passages in certain Messianic psalms. The whole apparatus of temple worship was interpreted afresh in the light of the new revelation, according to which Jesus was seen to be both Victim and High Priest, rending the veil that separated men from God and securing for His brethren unimpeded access to the Holy Place.

Soon also the cosmic relationships of Christ, implicit in the Gospel from the first, became explicit to the reflective consciousness of the Church. From Paul especially we get an interpretation of His eternal sonship, His association with God in creation and providence, no less than in judgment and salvation. To John He was the Word, the Logos, the pre-existent Wisdom or Sophia of later Judaism,

the Light that lightens every man coming into the world, the perfect human agent of the Father's self-expression. Every form of thought known to the writers of the New Testament was diligently explored to exalt His Messianic dignity. Indeed, there remained no sphere of the divine activity from which Jesus was excluded. The throne of the whole universe was not the Father's only : it was the throne of God and of the Lamb.

The victory and lordship of such a Saviour imposed upon the Church the urgent and joyful task of making known His redemption to all the world. Having proclaimed to Judaism that " Jesus is the Christ," the disciples must needs proclaim to Hellenism that " Jesus Christ is Lord." Starting from Jerusalem, therefore, they eagerly dispersed in all directions, bearing the water of life to a thirsty world. As missionaries of the Cross it was their special task, not primarily to relieve the physical wants of men, or to minister to their economic necessities, or even to change their social and political institutions (though all this was to follow the preaching of the Word), but rather to tell them of a new way of life and of a Saviour in whom was deliverance from sin, and the peace and joy of fellowship with God. In all such witness-bearing the Lord from heaven worked with His disciples in the Spirit, and made good His promise that He would abide with them till the end of the age should come.

We cannot conclude our survey of the New Testament material without remarking on the extraordinarily rapid development which is here involved.

Only half a century elapsed between the first appearance of the man-loving prophet of Galilee and His firm enthronement in the place of God Himself by the acclamation of multitudes of His adoring followers. Very noteworthy also is the variety, in the New Testament, of interpretations of His person, to no one of which the Church was exclusively committed. What chiefly emerges from our study, however, is the universally attested belief that, however it may be interpreted, a new relationship between God and man has been inaugurated by the coming of Christ into the world. It was to be the work of many succeeding generations to explore and unfold the significance of this great event.

CHAPTER II

THE CHRIST OF HISTORY

JESUS of Nazareth was bound to transcend the Judaism to which He first appealed, on His way to lordship over the entire world. Yet He could not do so without the understanding of His personality becoming profoundly changed in the process. Gentile thoughts were not as Jewish thoughts. The mentality of polytheistic peoples necessarily differed widely from that of a people trained to acknowledge the God of Israel. Even if the *facts* of Christ's life and teaching could have been faithfully reported, as His fame spread abroad throughout the world, the *interpretation* of such facts could not but undergo radical transformation when undertaken by Hellenic, Celtic, and Teutonic minds.

These influences acted both for evil and for good. On the one hand, as the years passed and the Church's membership increased, pagan infiltrations gradually coloured the generally received conception of Christ, making it different in many respects from the original revelation. On the other hand, the primitive evangel was to undergo enrichment and development as the result of dissemination. Its essence was to be disentangled from the forms under which it first appeared, and embodied in new forms without vital loss. The seed of the Kingdom,

if all its hidden potency was to be revealed, must needs be transplanted to other soils.

Suppose it granted that a world revelation was given in Jesus Christ, it follows that a world interpretation was necessary for its unfolding. The interpretation given by Hebraism could be no more primary, though it might be more primitive, than that to be contributed by Hellenism or Teutonism. Indeed, there were aspects of Christ's message that might from the first be *better* understood by Gentiles than by Jews. Neither on one mountain nor on another could men exclusively worship the Father revealed in Him. Jesus came to fulfil, not the Mosaic law only, but the desire of all nations. This He could do only by taking the different moulds of thought already characteristic of the diverse peoples of the world, and absorbing whatever was vital and true in each.

I

The interpretation of Jesus Christ reached by the *Græco-Roman world* is of the greatest importance to us, because it was destined to dominate the Christian mind for centuries. The Greeks formulated the creeds, and the Romans compacted the closely knit ecclesiastical organisation, which were to hold undisputed sway over the Middle Ages, and indeed to influence the world till the present day. By passing from its Hebraic to its Hellenistic phase, Christianity was enabled to shed some of its early fanaticisms and to appeal to reason. It lost its provincial or national first outlook and became truly cosmopolitan and universal. Yet, on the other hand,

by becoming thus westernised, it lost for ever its oriental character.

Already, in the Epistle to the Hebrews and in John's Gospel, Greek elements and affinities had begun to make their appearance in Christian thought. In one respect at least Christianity and Hellenism were agreed. Both were based on the same fundamental principle that the primordial reality, the ultimate ground of all existence, is spiritual. Yet in their respective attitudes to the things of the spirit the two races widely differed. The Hebrew mind was intuitive, imaginative, intensely ethical and religious, fond of concrete metaphor and symbol, ill-adapted to abstract speculation, or the raising of ultimate questions regarding the nature of God, His relation to the world, and the origin of evil. The Greek mind, on the other hand, was analytical, discursive, and philosophical, fond of examining everything in the light of reason, assigning it to its place in some category of pure thought, and explaining it by means of elaborate cosmogonies and mythologies.

Especially important in this connection was the tendency to dualism which ran through all Greek philosophy. Most Hellenistic thinkers, in particular, regarded the material world as inherently imperfect and corrupt, if not radically evil, and they placed the human and the divine in such absolute opposition that no true reconciliation was possible between them. If a soul was to be saved it must be enabled to rise from its prison-house of sense and soar to its true home in the abode of God. In the system of Plotinus (third century) this meant a pro-

gressive release of the individual spirit from its finitude, first into the world-soul, then into the rarer spirituality of the Nous or Universal Mind, and its final elevation to the ecstatic trance of supra-rational identification with the ineffable and only ONE, the Absolute behind all phenomena, from whom every positive attribute has been stripped away. In the more crude and popular scheme of Pseudo-Dionysius, two centuries later, the final purification of the soul was mediated by a hierarchy of triads—Seraphim, Cherubim, and Thrones ; Dominations, Virtues, Powers ; Principalities, Angels, and Archangels ; all of them ascending and descending, as it were, between mortal man, caught in the meshes of human flesh, and the eternal God, abiding in the region of pure Spirit.

What was to be the effect of the coming of Christ into this strange, cloudy phantasmagoria of beliefs ? Inevitably the Greeks, who could attach no meaning to the term Messiah, or to the message of an impending apocalyptic Kingdom, tried to fit Jesus into their own conceptions of the universe. They transferred Him from a system of transcendental theism to one of philosophic dualism ; from forms of thought which made it difficult to speak of Christ as God to those in which, as in polytheism, the ascription of divinity was already natural and familiar. The term " Lord," applied to the same Christ by different peoples and in different senses, made the transition easy.

One consequence was that, among the Greeks, attention came to be concentrated almost exclusively on Christ's transcendental aspect. His earthly life

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in Galilee and Jerusalem, His sayings about leaven and sheep and flowers, His intercourse with Peter or Martha or the woman with an infirmity, were practically ignored, and Christ came to be regarded chiefly as Lord of a hierarchy of saints and angels, the central figure of a vast cosmogony. He who lived primarily to accomplish a mighty work in changing the moral attitude of sinful men to a living and holy God was made to explain the constitution of the universe and caught up into an airy gossamer web of metaphysical speculation. Jesus was above all things personal in His thought of God ; He drew His illustrations of the Father's love from the most concrete realities and homely simplicities of domestic life ; yet when He passed into the Greek world He became Himself well-nigh dissolved and lost to sight in a rosy cloud of æons, syzygies, and emanations.

But not only was Christ's person thus speculatively interpreted. A further consequence was that His redemptive work also came to be differently understood. The typically Greek conception of salvation was theosophic and ceremonial rather than moral, involving a divinisation of human nature, its deliverance from the pollution and transience of all things earthly, and its quasi-physical transfusion with the substance of deity, through sacraments, illumination, and a special gnosis. The specifically Christian conception, on the other hand, was ethical and religious, involving a turning of the will from sin to righteousness, through repentance and faith, love and service. Its message of redemption, accordingly, was one of conversion, forgiveness,

reconciliation, rather than of enlightenment, initiation, and sacramentalism. This distinction is important, and justifies Paul's distrust of " the wisdom of this world " as an interpreter of the foolishness of the cross of Christ.

In still another direction Greek philosophy profoundly affected the world's conception of Jesus. By thinking of Him almost exclusively in His transcendental aspect, Hellenism so removed Christ from ordinary affairs that it became necessary to introduce a world of more homely and familiar mediating beings who should transmit His blessings to the faithful. In this way, under a thin disguise, pagan polytheism made its appearance within the Christian Church, tutelary deities became patron saints, and Mary herself came to receive honours properly due to her Son only. Finally, Greek philosophy, by its inherent dualism, its pessimistic depreciation of the senses and the material world, its exaltation of ecstasy, contemplation, and the beatific vision, tended to disparage ordinary family affection and human love, and gave a great impulse to those ideals of asceticism, celibacy, and monasticism which were later to dominate the Middle Ages.

II

The interpretation of Christ in the Græco-Roman world, however, was influenced not only by the philosophic thought of Hellenism, but also by the *popular cultus* at much more superstitious levels. The religion of the people during the early Christian centuries was largely astrological. Between the soul, immersed in its darksome prison-house of flesh,

and its true spiritual home in the Uncreated Light, seven enveloping spheres intervened, each guarded by one or another of a host of dæmonic elements or powers. How could it hope to wing its upward flight past these impediments, or remember all the passports necessary to secure its progress? Only by the help of assisting angels. Here, where philosophic minds relied on gnosis or illumination, the unlettered votary naturally resorted to theurgic practices and sacramental magic. He loved to dabble in sorceries, divinations, and other occult practices, largely derived from the earlier observance of Dionysian and Orphic mysteries.

It was impossible that Jesus of Nazareth should enter this religious atmosphere without being changed almost beyond recognition. The human mind does not readily alter its ingrained habits and beliefs, particularly in religion, and it was much easier for the peoples of the Græco-Roman world to fashion Christ according to their own image than it was for Christ to impose His image upon them. Sacraments, of course, were not unknown to primitive Christianity. But a sacrament to a Jew meant a dramatic symbol or object lesson, bringing some spiritual truth vividly before the eye or the imagination, yet always distinguishable from, and subordinate to, the living truth or word of which it spoke. Its significance, moreover, was chiefly ethical or eschatological. The realistic view of the sacraments, on the other hand, which regards them as inherently regenerative, and capable of conveying grace through and by means of the sacramental symbol itself, and on the occasion of its use merely,

was Greek and oriental in its origin, and entirely foreign to the Hebrew mind. "Sacramentalism," as even Bishop Gore admits, "was not a characteristic of the Jews." *

This very natural popular perversion of the teaching of Jesus, which gradually substituted for the simple and solemn breaking of bread among brethren the hieratic celebration of a eucharistic sacrifice, was destined to influence the Church for many centuries, and to carry with it a great enhancement of the sacerdotal function. What began as a metaphor ended as a metamorphosis. Magic and mystery entered in as the emphasis upon moral and spiritual personality receded, and Jesus was supposed to work secretly on the souls of men on a level lower than that of consciousness and will.

The process could not stop with the recognised sacraments : it must run through the whole apparatus of religious worship. If miraculous properties might reside in baptismal water or eucharistic bread, why might they not also reside in bones of martyrs or the consecrated relics of the saints ? In these developments popular Christianity became little more than the old paganism transformed. "It was as a mystery religion that Europe accepted Christianity. . . . Just as the Jewish Christians took with them the whole framework of apocalyptic Messianism, and set the figure of Jesus within it, so the Greeks took with them the whole scheme of mysteries, with their sacraments, their purifications and fasts, their idea of a mystical brotherhood, and their doctrine of 'salvation' through membership

* *The Spirit and the Church*, p. 92.

in a divine society, worshipping Christ as the patronal deity of their mysteries . . . St. Paul, who was ready to fight to the death against the Judaising of Christianity, was willing to take the first step, and a long one, towards the Paganising of it. . . . He does not appear to have foreseen the unethical and polytheistic development of sacramental institutionalism." *

It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that these changes were wholly evil. The Christian spirit somehow vitalised the elements it borrowed from pagan sources and supplemented their defects. The very prevalence of mystery cults in the Græco-Roman world of the first few centuries shows there was a widespread craving for something more than the old polytheistic religions had been able to give. Jesus alone satisfied this thirst. We must not be surprised if popular imagination found itself at first unable to apprehend Christ save under forms to which it had become accustomed in the pagan religious practices of many centuries. The early Church found heathenism expiring, as it were, on the doorstep of the Christian temple. In the spirit of charity and compassion, though at considerable risk of infection, it took its rival in, baptised it with consecrating Christian rites, and imparted to it a new and vigorous life.

III

The impact of Jesus Christ upon the *Roman* mind need not detain us long. Where the genius of Greece was speculative, that of Rome was

* W. R. Inge, *Outspoken Essays* (First Series), pp. 227–228.

administrative and juristic. The energetic conquerors of the world were well content to leave philosophy and the mild pursuits of art to those whom they had subdued, and to turn their own attention to much more urgent and practical concerns. Life to them consisted in doing, rather than in thinking or imagining or feeling. Hence, in matters of religion, the relation of Jesus Christ to law and grace, to the punishment and remission of sins, to authority and order and firm discipline, became of supreme importance. These ideas the Roman worked over into the compact ecclesiastical system of Catholic Christianity, which was to resist the assaults of time for more than a dozen centuries.

Moreover, to the Roman mind, religion was not so much a personal as it was a social, political, national concern. It was an affair of the State. The Emperor, as the head of a vast imperial organisation, the visible embodiment of its unity, dignity, authority, and power, was everywhere to be officially revered as a semi-divine person ; and Christianity, when it was generally adopted by the Romans, necessarily became a State religion also, firmly disciplined and well organised, yet with a distinct weakening of that spiritual intimacy of personal communion with Christ which had formerly characterised it. As in the well-regimented Catholicism of to-day, only through the duly authorised channels of grace provided by the whole organisation could the individual draw nigh to God or hope to receive the special blessings which religion had to give. Very marvellous, surely, was the transformation

by which that same Jesus, who had once been crucified in a remote part of the Empire by the authority of Cæsar, whose followers had been relentlessly persecuted as an illicit, immoral, anti-imperial association, came in the course of the centuries, in the person of His earthly vicar, to occupy that throne of power which Cæsar himself had not been able to retain. The Greek interpretation of Christianity culminated in the Mass ; the Roman, in the Papacy. In the former, Christ was exposed to the adoration of believers as veritably present under the substance of bread and wine ; in the latter, He was raised to the throne of autocratic power.

It would convey an entirely wrong impression, however, if we were to dwell only on the perversions of Christianity which accompanied its diffusion through the Græco-Roman world. The radiance which streamed from Christ found its way through every obscuring medium by which His influence was transmitted. Coming to men in a strangely non-Hebraic guise, He still accomplished His characteristic work of bringing them to God. Jesus personalised and made lovable the abstract universal Soul or Reason of the Stoics, and presented a definitely concrete and infinitely adorable ideal to a world groping after God if haply it might find Him. For the proud fortitude, the dignified, self-sufficing independence of the old Roman religion, so manfully seeking, amid the rush and whirl of this world's unrest, an asylum of peace unreached by the darts of fickle Fortune, Jesus substituted the joy of lowliness and humble dependence upon the infinite love

of God. He scattered the cloud of dæmons which darkened the face of the eternal Father, asked for inner personal loyalty to Himself rather than soulless outward conformity to a politico-religious system, and in the midst of a decadent and world-weary civilisation raised men above the vicissitudes and futilities of mortal things. He also proved Himself a good shepherd to the dispossessed everywhere, and gave to the humblest slave of a Roman master the status, the new dignity, the infinite spiritual worth of a child of God. Finally, He brought into the stagnant waters of the Roman world a life-giving current of social enthusiasm for a *cause*. The marvellous thing about the progress of Christianity through the Græco-Roman world is that it should assimilate so much from its new environment, yet lose so little of the original revelation from which it sprang. At the close of the period Jesus had fully earned the tribute so reluctantly paid to Him by the Emperor Julian, "Galilean, Thou hast conquered!"

IV

What impression did Jesus make upon *Egypt*? How was He received in the land of the Pharaohs, the land which gave to the world the Sphinx and the Pyramids, the Book of the Dead, and the art treasures of Tutankhamen? Here was a highly developed civilisation, closely adjacent to the land of Palestine, with a history stretching into the remote past and animated throughout by a deeply religious spirit. The ancient Egyptian myth of Osiris closely resembled Christianity in some respects. It, too,

could speak of a dying and rising god, of secret initiatory rites and mysteries, of the impartial weighing of good and evil in the scales of judgment, and of a resurrection from this world's corruption to the bliss of immortality.

When we consider the Coptic Church's interpretation of Christ we must be careful to distinguish its northern and southern sections. In the city of Alexandria everything took on a liberal and progressive aspect. Here, in the centre of the world's commerce, the most cosmopolitan city within the Roman Empire, were men of every nationality and school of thought. Christianity from the first was granted a hospitable welcome, on the condition that it should prove itself able to hold its own amid the clash of freely contending opinion. It must look to be sheltered by no favouritism, excluded by no bigotry, supported by no authority. The Teacher of whom it spoke must be able to make good His claims in open competition with Plato, with Zeno, or with Epicurus. Nothing could better suit the genius of the new religion. It meant that Jesus was once again placed among the doctors, in His favourite attitude of asking and answering questions.

The Church at Alexandria consequently developed a liberal and enlightened character. Under such teachers as Clement and Origen it eagerly interested itself in classical poetry and rhetoric and the prevailing philosophies of the day. It was taken as axiomatic that the Spirit of Jesus was friendly to sound learning and the most patient, unbiased inquiry into truth, since in Him were hid all the treasures of wisdom and of knowledge. For

every succeeding age the Church of Alexandria vindicated the claims of reason in religion. It freely annexed the whole realm of speculative thought in the service of Christianity. At the same time the danger of doctrinaire leanness was averted by the discipline of martyrdom. The faith in Christ which was acquired in the quiet atmosphere of colleges and lecture-halls stood the supreme test of the executing sword of Septimius Severus as well as the fanatical riots which led to the storming of the Serapeum and the murder of Hypatia.

Very different conditions prevailed in the upper valley of the Nile. Here all circumstances combined to produce an ascetic type of Christianity and a comparative stunting of the intellectual life. The simple-minded fellaheen of the desert had no taste at all for the subtle disputes which characterised the life of the Church at Alexandria. The type of religion they understood best was that which recalled the worship in which they had been brought up, or which resembled the fanaticism of an African dervish. Communities of Christians of this type were recruited from time to time by fugitives who had escaped from the persecutions farther north, or by contemplatives who, with an inborn love of solitude, desired to flee from the pagan artificialities of a corrupt and luxurious metropolis. Upon all such the inscrutable and silent desert, so remote from everything and yet so near at hand, exerted a mysterious fascination. Its illimitable sands kept at a distance all worldly distractions and every curious inquirer. Its grottos and caves and rocky tombs were deliciously cool amid the torrid heats of

mid-day, yet they retained something of their warmth during the chilly seasons of the night. What conditions could be more favourable to quiet prayer and uninterrupted commerce with the unseen? Hither, therefore, in the third century, came St. Anthony, first and greatest of the Church's anchorites, who spent twenty years in desert solitude, blocking the entrance to his cave with a huge stone in order that he might worship Christ in peace.

To us it may seem exceedingly strange that devotion to the Nazarene should lead to such developments as this. The Son of Man came eating and drinking. Wherever He went He was so thronged with people that the question "Who touched me?" appeared ridiculous. Jesus prayed to the Father, not that His disciples should be taken out of the world, but that they should be kept from the evil that is in the world. How came it, then, that such a Teacher was spiritually served and adored in all honesty by men who shunned their fellow-creatures like the plague? Could salt be expected to preserve meat from corruption, if placed by itself upon a shelf apart? What possible service could be rendered by leaven, if it were not duly mingled with the meal?

That there was something false and suicidal in the extreme, self-centred asceticism of Egypt may be judged from the fact that nature in many instances took ample revenge upon those lonely and misguided fanatics, either luring them on, through morbid introspection and utter stagnation and vacuity of mind, to frenzied hallucination and blank insanity, or else driving them, by a violent reaction,

to drown all memory of their maddening austerities in a life of rioting and debauchery amid the stews of Alexandria.

Yet the ascetic ideal of holiness, which was first and most rigorously practised by the hermits of the Thebaid, dominated the mind of the Church for centuries, and it contained an admixture of both good and evil. Doubtless the withdrawal of the most spiritually minded from civil and domestic life was a serious calamity, and it directly helped to bring about the fall of the Roman Empire. Asceticism exalted the achievements of a few religious athletes, but it correspondingly depressed the standards of ordinary morality, and cut off whole regions of life from any possibility of consecration by the spirit of holiness. On the other hand, contemplatives were not lost to society as a moral and religious influence. They existed to protest against the growing secularisation of the Church itself and they immensely impressed a rude and uncultured age with the power of unworldliness as an ideal. Simeon Stylites, perched on a pillar sixty feet in height, may be said to have rendered no practical service to a single human soul. Yet he exerted a far-reaching religious influence for thirty years. As one of the wonders of the world in the fifth century he drew, from places as far apart as India and Gaul, multitudes of pilgrims whose one desire was to receive the blessing of so holy and venerable a saint. Apparently the truth as it is in Jesus can be commended to dull minds or a gross and superstitious age only by some degree of extravagance and exaggeration. A spiritual protest, if it is to have effect, must some-

times be as violently one-sided as that against which it raises its indignant witness.

V

The Church of *Eastern Syria* dwelt apart and was very little influenced by the principal currents agitating early Christianity. Geographically, Edessa was difficult of access, being remotely situated in northern Mesopotamia, close to the upper reaches of the Euphrates, with many miles of Syrian desert separating it from the mother-church of Antioch. Linguistically, it was cut off from the Greek everywhere spoken in the Hellenic world, since it held stubbornly to its own Syriac dialect, a variation of the Aramaic spoken in Palestine in the time of the apostles. Politically, it succeeded in preserving its independence till the third century, and when it did come under the sway of the greater world powers, it was more influenced by Parthia and Persia than by Rome. Theologically, it took little interest in the Christological controversies which long divided the Church elsewhere, and flourished quite happily on teaching deeply infected with Gnosticism, Nestorianism, and Zoroastrianism, without so much as suspecting that it was imbibing heresy.

The result of this geographical and ecclesiastical isolation was that the Church at Edessa, being a kind of oasis in the desert, was thrown back upon itself and upon its Master, and cultivated the spiritual life with a purity and freshness unknown elsewhere. In the homilies of Aphraates, a monk of the Convent of St. Matthew, near Mosul, it possessed a doctrinal and devotional treatise of real value, which laid the

greatest emphasis on the mystical union of the believer with Jesus Christ through the dwelling of the Holy Spirit within the heart. While the fathers of Catholic orthodoxy were busily absorbed in philosophical speculation regarding Christ's place in the Trinity or the metaphysical secret of His person, Aphraates, meditating in quiet eddies far apart from the main stream, was thinking rather of Christ as a power and a presence within the heart of man, to help him in his warfare with moral evil. "Why should we not worship Jesus, through whom we know God, Jesus who turned away our mind from vain superstitions and taught us to adore the one God, our Father and Maker, and to serve Him? Is it not better to do this than to worship the kings and emperors of this world?" There are aspects of Christ which are best apprehended in seasons of unfettered development and quiet peace. Where the storms of controversy come not, and the terms "orthodox" and "heterodox" lose half their significance by losing all their bitterness, and there is the goodly sight of brethren dwelling together in unity, the Master is not slow to reveal Himself to those who love Him.

VI

The *Persian* Church, in interpreting Christ, was prevailingly missionary and evangelistic. For this there were two reasons. On the one hand it was planted close to one of the great trade routes of the ancient world. Caravans proceeding from Europe or western Asia to India or China passed through Seleucia Ctesiphon, and it was natural for followers

of Christ in those regions to desire to send to the remoter east something more precious than gums or perfumes or costly fabrics. On the other hand the Persian Christians were impelled eastwards by suspicion of heresy and experiences of persecution. Nestorius had been condemned at the Council of Ephesus in the year 431 for teaching that, though Jesus was fully inspired by the Spirit of God and was therefore morally perfect in all respects, the *foundation* of His personality was essentially human. The anathemas and expulsions which followed this decision drove Nestorius and his followers from Constantinople and Antioch to Edessa, and then, when the theological school there was suppressed for heresy, farther and farther east to regions beyond. The hostility of the champions of Zoroastrianism, in Persia, and the persecuting zeal of King Sapur, in the fourth century, by which over 10,000 Christians were put to death, led to the same result. Armenia and Arabia were thus evangelised. Missionaries of the Cross reached Khorassan, Turkistan, and Samarcand. They sailed the sea to Travancore, in India, passed on to Ceylon, and even carried the story of Christ to China.

It is a remarkable fact that zeal for the propagation of the Christian Gospel does not always proceed from settled, orthodox, and highly prosperous Churches. We frequently find that it is some attempt to suppress Christianity, or stamp out the apparently dying embers of some heresy, which has been the means of scattering the sparks of living truth in all directions, and so extending the area of conflagration. The "trouble which arose about

Stephen" in the early Church and the consequent spread of Christianity to missionary Antioch and thence to the whole world, the expulsion of the Huguenots from France in the sixteenth century, and the flight of the Pilgrim Fathers from England in the seventeenth century, are all of them illustrations of this principle. It is through much tribulation, and the persistent zeal of oppressed and persecuted minorities, that the Kingdom of God is often most powerfully advanced.

VII

We turn now to the *Greek* Church and its conception of Christ. Here three things are especially to be noted.

In the first place, Eastern Christianity was early characterised by a spirit of meek subservience to the State. Constantine was a masterful and autocratic potentate, who appointed and deposed patriarchs, summoned and dismissed councils, and even interfered in determining theological decisions. He had been won over to Christianity, it was said, by the vision of a brightly illuminated cross, resplendent in the heavens, and bearing the inscription "By this conquer"; and though his conversion was probably sincere, his conception of his imperial position made him regard the conduct of church affairs as very little more than an important department of official statecraft. The result was that paralysing bondage, that fatal loss of independence and autonomy, which always attends an Erastian conception of the Church. That which in New

Testament times was a select spiritual community, dedicated to a holy life, and united to Christ by faith and love, became under Constantine and his successors a State organisation, obsequiously subject to civil government and control. The sanctuary, in short, became overshadowed by the palace. Bishops were constrained to take their proper place at the footstools of kings and emperors. By humbly accepting this patronage and protection, by meekly bowing to this despotic rule, the Eastern Church gained in worldly consequence and prestige, but sacrificed her freedom and yielded up her soul.

In the second place, Eastern Christianity was characterised by great splendour in the outward accompaniments of worship. Constantine and Justinian were proud and ambitious builders, and they loved to adorn the imperial city on the Bosphorus with costly palaces. It was naturally deemed fitting that the basilicas of the Church, and everything that went on in them, should exhibit a similar profusion. The architecture must be ornate and gorgeous, the ritual imposing, the robes and ceremonies and altar decorations dazzling in their brilliance, as became sanctuaries which were attended and maintained by kings. This was the period of rich Byzantine art and of elaborate liturgical development in worship. Jesus of Nazareth was presented to His people in a glitter of gold and silver, jewels and precious stones, gaudily enamelled icons, many-coloured mosaics and mural paintings. He came to them in a pomp of embroidered vestments and solemn processions, in the sonority of full-throated choirs singing the Trisagion, and in buildings whose dusky roofs, dome

rising above dome, were illumined by the radiance of hundreds of candelabra.

In the third place, the Eastern Church was marked by extraordinary rigidity of doctrine. Whereas the Latin Church aimed at being before all things Catholic, the Greek Church sought primarily to be Orthodox, and Holy because Orthodox. Its chief concern was the clear definition and final enunciation of the faith once for all delivered to the saints. To this end theologians debated and scholars argued. The great councils of the Church were held in the east; and as these ecclesiastical assemblies warmed to their work of carefully analysing the dual personality of Christ, angry prelates vied with stone-throwing mobs in manifesting the zeal with which they defended the subtlest niceties of metaphysics. When agreed decisions had finally been reached, however, it became impossible that they should be altered. All innovation was regarded with pious horror and a cast-iron fixity of dogma was imposed upon the Church. The result has been that, comparatively speaking, spiritual torpor, intellectual stagnation, a rigid immobility of tradition, have settled upon Eastern Christianity from the seventh century till now.

We may deplore this blighting influence of obscurantism and lament the substitution of doctrinal orthodoxy for personal devotion as a test of faith in Christ. What is there, we ask, in all this religion of relics, holy vestments, amulets, posturings, and sterile creeds, even remotely resembling the primitive Gospel of the Messiah? Has not Jesus here become invested with the insignia of everything He

came to abolish and destroy? The Greek Orthodox Church, as Dr. Adeney suggests,* is encased in an antique garment, stiff with its threefold embroidery, doctrinal, disciplinary, and ceremonial, and so inflexible as almost to deprive the Church which it enfolds of the breath of life. Yet even within these stiflings and obscurations the Spirit of Jesus has been able to find expression, as the beautiful hymns of the Eastern Church sufficiently attest. It was no merely metaphysical apprehension of the Second Person of the Trinity, for example, that could inspire the following:—

Jesu, Name all names above,
Jesu, best and dearest,
Jesu, Fount of perfect love,
Holiest, tend'rest, nearest;
Jesu, Source of grace completest,
Jesu truest, Jesu sweetest,
Jesu, Well of power Divine,
Make me, keep me, seal me Thine! †

VIII

The *Russian* Church owes its formation very largely to the ornate splendours of Eastern Christianity. When Vladimir's delegation of nobles visited Constantinople in the tenth century, they were so impressed by the magnificence of the worship in the Church of St. Sophia, so dazed by the multitude of lights, equal in splendour to the brightness of the sun, that they unhesitatingly recommended the national adhesion to a religion which

* *The Greek and Eastern Churches*, p. 339.

† Theoctistus of the Studium, *circa* A.D. 890. Neale, *Hymns of the Eastern Church*, No. 8.

could produce so sublime a spectacle. This element of sumptuousness has characterised, and perhaps blighted, the Orthodox Church in Russia ever since. Every art, or artifice, that can arouse the soul is employed to enrich the solemnities of public worship. Vestments are changed, processions come and go, candles are lighted and then extinguished, doors are significantly opened and then closed again, melodious voices wail in the Kyrie-Eleison or rise to a mighty rapture in the Gloria. Everywhere there is colour, perfume, movement, rich pageantry, and suggestive symbolism. The senses are enthralled by the kaleidoscopic splendour, and the spirit is subdued to mystic awe as the long-drawn liturgy moves to its solemn and inspiring close.

The danger of such a type of worship is that it shall provide an imposing public spectacle and nothing more. A man may submit to the whole wonderful series of æsthetic impressions, reverently take part in the most gorgeous ceremonies, and yet remain completely unvisited by any experimental knowledge of the Gospel of Christ Jesus. The central facts of Christianity are indeed vividly represented, but while there is much to appeal to the imagination, there is little to feed the mind, to search the conscience, and to satisfy the heart. Russian Christianity remains childlike, external, superstitious, and fond of pictures. For multitudes of devout peasants, religion consists in the observance of saints' days, pilgrimages to holy shrines, the veneration of sacred icons, or the fervent kissing of some wonder-working relic. It is not surprising

that in the long history of Eastern Christianity dissenting sects abound, which gropingly seek to substitute for the fossil pedantry of the official Church something more closely resembling the pure simplicities of primitive Christianity. The revolt of Tolstoy against the orthodox teaching of his time, his violent reaction to a severely literal interpretation and application of the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount, may be attributed to a like cause.

IX

It must have been with feelings of almost paralysing terror that the later Roman Empire witnessed the advancing strength of the *Teutonic nations*. Along a frontier of two thousand miles, weakly defended by languishing and dejected troops, there surged many tribes of migrating, unkempt barbarians—Goths, Huns, and Vandals; Franks, Lombards, and Burgundians; Sarmatians, Scythians, and Saxons—who chafed behind their appointed barriers, impatient to plunder the rich provinces of the south. To hold them back was like trying to arrest a prairie fire, or endeavouring to stem by means of some crumbling earthwork the ever advancing billows of the sea. The Teutons swept over the decaying Empire of the Cæsars like a devastating flood, a strangely terrifying race of conquerors, tall, blue-eyed, and flaxen-haired, with death-bringing swords in their hands and mantles of skin upon their shoulders, fierce in aspect, ruthless in slaughter, insatiable in plunder, swooping impetuously down from uncouth regions in which were neither roads nor cities, impiously desecrating altars

and sanctuaries as they advanced. How could God allow such things? Were Christ and His saints asleep? Must not all culture, the gradual growth of centuries, be hopelessly submerged, the jealously guarded light of truth and holiness be extinguished, and the prestige of an empire slowly becoming Christian suffer irreparable damage and collapse?

In the course of time, however, other aspects of the situation came to be considered. The northern invaders, on closer acquaintance, showed that they possessed qualities which Rome conspicuously lacked, such as appeared well calculated, when the first frenzy of invasion had spent itself, to rejuvenate a sadly decaying civilisation. The northmen brought with them simplicity of manners and a virile, strenuous, manly type of character, developed through conflict with the grudging infertility of nature and the worship of such gods as Thor and Odin. Theirs, too, was a jealous, high-spirited devotion to freedom and independence, combined with great skill in the arts of organised self-government, and an inborn instinct for the advantages of justice and law and order. The Teutons also exhibited, though in a rudimentary form, a highly sensitive moral nature, remarkable energy and tenacity of purpose, steadfastness in labour, and a love of truth, fealty, and honour. What was still more important, they had developed in the depths of their northern forests great emotional capacity, a mystic inwardness of seriousness and reverence, which made them readily responsive to spiritual influences from the unseen world. Above all, they held womanhood in honour,

respected the purity of the marriage tie, strictly guarded the sanctity of the home, and cherished the highest ideals of love and tenderness in the holy intimacies of family life. Might not an infusion of these virtues prove the salvation of a decrepit society and a morally enfeebled civilisation? Perhaps the coming of such a "scourge of God" was just the discipline which the Empire needed. In the providence of the divine Husbandman it might well be that the grafting of this wild but very vigorous stock upon an ancient tree might yield in the end better and sweeter fruit.

With unfailing courage, therefore, and with instinctive spiritual tact in respect of method, the Church of Christ addressed itself to the task of converting the northern races, little suspecting that with them was to lie the future leadership of mankind. Carnal weapons had manifestly failed to subdue them; others must be resorted to which were not carnal but spiritual. Where the Empire's legions had been ingloriously defeated, the Holy Catholic Church must step in and overcome. The supernatural efficacy of a bishop's crosier must achieve that which the utmost power of the sword had been unable to accomplish. Christianity had mastered the Roman world because it had been able to console, invigorate, and re-inspire an Empire in decay. When confronted with the virile young peoples of the north, in the full flush of intoxicating success, its task was very different. Here, as Dean Church reminds us, it had "to control and regenerate noble instinct, to awaken conscience, to humble pride, to curb luxuriant and self-reliant strength, to

train and educate and apply to high ends the force of powerful wills and masculine characters." *

Jesus, then, came to the northern peoples "as one having authority." With stateliness of pomp and ceremony, with much waving of banners and the solemn chanting of psalms and litanies by white-robed choristers, with the awe-inspiring elevation of a silver cross or the most sacred Host, Leo laid the spell of the unseen on Attila, Remigius on Clovis, Augustine on Ethelbert, with the result that the conversion of these rulers quickly followed. Very different was Christ's first victory over the Empire a century or two before. Then He appeared as a root out of the dry ground, with no form nor comeliness, and conquered in the lowly and humble guise of a crucified, despicable Jew. Now He advanced to further triumphs as one invested with all authority, accompanied by the prestige of ancient culture and incontestable superiority in all the arts and advantages of civilisation.

So direct an appeal to the spiritual imagination of the northmen could not and did not fail. The conquerors were conquered. To the miracle-working power of the Cross the docile and rude barbarians, fresh from their native forests, meekly yielded. They had made short work of Rome's military strength, but they could not resist asceticism and the holy mysteries. In physical stature they were sons of Anak, but in spiritual development they were as new-born babes. As such they readily absorbed the pure milk of the Word offered them by the Church. It seemed to them manifest that

* *The Gifts of Civilisation*, p. 271.

emissaries from Rome, who placed no reliance on the arm of flesh, yet bore on their features the imprint of serene majesty and power, must indeed be none other than ambassadors of the Most High God. They therefore unquestioningly accepted all that the monks told them about heaven and hell, God the Father and Christ the Son, the beautiful angels and the all-sufficing grace of the Virgin Mary. Their only misgiving in accepting the "White Christ," so different from the gods of their ancestral worship, was lest His gentleness should tame their ferocity overmuch, a thing which it was precisely designed to do.

It is doubtless true that Jesus of Nazareth was imperfectly presented to the northern nations and inadequately apprehended by them. When wholesale baptisms took place as the result of the conversion of a chief or his consort, who conceived of Christ as but a stronger deity than Thor or Odin, the spiritual gains achieved were necessarily superficial. An extensive influence was won in inverse proportion to intensive inwardness and power. Indeed, the essential spirit of Teutonic Christianity, so long hidden and overlaid by the alien Latin system imposed upon it, did not fully manifest itself until there came the Gothic architecture, the sentimental chivalry, and the scholastic philosophy of a later date, as well as the violent historical revulsion from Latin Christianity which we call the Protestant Reformation.

Yet Christ's victory in the north was essentially a spiritual one. He entered upon His new domain as a mightily educative, enlightening, and disci-

plinary force. Jesus superseded Balder, not only because He represented a higher civilisation, but also because He brought a clearer revelation of that unseen world in which the Teutonic peoples were vitally and sincerely interested. "Can this stranger," asked a Saxon chief, when the Christian missionary Paulinus had likened man's life to the flight of a swallow out of the dark and into the dark again through a brightly lighted room—"Can this stranger give us sure knowledge of what has gone before our life and what will come hereafter? If so, let us receive him gratefully."

X

There is a fundamental affinity between certain aspects of the Spirit of Jesus and the *Celtic* genius. He who chose for His chief apostle the warm-hearted and impulsive Peter, unstable as water, yet capable of being moved by the most ardent enthusiasms and ideals, could not but find much to appeal to in the passionate and highly imaginative temperament which characterised the remote peoples on the north-western fringe of the Roman Empire. The Celts received Christianity early, and they embraced it with an impetuosity and zeal not always shared by their Saxon neighbours, who on the whole preferred correctness and compromise and "a sober standard of feeling in matters of religion."

The perfervid imaginativeness of the Celt, when it became receptive of Christianity, took many forms. We see it in a prevailing tendency to embellish the facts of history with a thick growth of legend and credulously to attribute extraordinary

miracle-working powers to the persons and even to the relics of the saints. It appears also in the artistic sensibility which has given us so many richly carved crosiers and illuminated missals, and which has recorded its loving devotion to Christ in the fair bright colours and exquisite designs of the Book of Kells. The same poetic temperament brought the Christian religion into closest connection with the love of nature, and readily traced something of the Spirit's working in the moan of the forest, the wrath of the storm-cloud, the infinite mystery and fascination of the sea.

The characteristic interpretation which Christ received from the Celtic Church, however, is to be seen in none of these things, but rather in its zeal for monasticism and missions. Celtic Christianity produced, in harmonious co-operation, spiritual communities and wandering evangelists. Patrick travelled far and wide in Ireland, exposed to every hardship amid frost and snow, in order to win pagans to faith in Christ and gather even the sons of princes into monasteries. Columba, from his collection of wattled huts and rude clay biggings on the island of Iona, set out to disperse the darkness of Pictish Druidism, sending bright beams of light as far as Inverness and the distant Orkneys. Columbanus, on his way through France, was well content to subsist upon herbs and wild honey and the fruits of the field, if only, an old man of sixty, he might ascend the swift current of the river Rhine, and carry the Gospel of Christ to Switzerland and Lombardy. Similar tasks were undertaken by Ninian and Kentigern in Strathclyde, by Aidan and Cuthbert in

Northumbria, and by innumerable other saints and pioneers whose names are now immortalised upon the map of Cornwall.

This restless and passionate love of souls, this roving adventurousness and propagandist zeal, this consuming eagerness *pro Christo peregrinari*, truly reproduced the spirit of early Christianity. How hazardous it all was, and how dependent upon the support of heavenly grace, may appear from the following well-known prayer of the holy Patrick : " Christ protect me against poison, burning, drowning, death-wounds. Christ be with me, before me, behind me, within me, below me, above me ; at my right, at my left ; in the fort, in the chariot seat, in the poop ; in the heart of every one that thinks of me, in the mouth of every one that speaks to me, in the eye of every one that sees me, in the ear of every one that hears me."

XI

This chapter must now come to an end, though the subject with which it deals is far from being exhausted. We have seen how to the interpretation of Jesus Christ the Greeks brought philosophy ; the Romans, a genius for law and government ; the Copts, asceticism ; the Syrian Church, devoted piety and meditation ; the Persians, missionary zeal ; the Eastern and Russian Churches, steadfast orthodoxy and ritualistic splendour ; the northern nations, lusty vigour and the gifts of imagination and romance. Where will the process end ? What will be the contribution of India, of Africa, of China and Japan, of the lonely coast-lands and far-off

islands of the sea? Only time can show. We seem to stand by the side of a mighty River of Life, which has its source in the distant uplands of Galilee, receives into its bosom many tributary streams from this people and from that in the course of history, flows now turbid and now crystal clear, and grows ever deeper and more voluminous as it proceeds. It is impossible now to turn back that river, or even to distinguish clearly the currents that compose it. On its ever-rolling flood the life of the world is irresistibly borne onward—whither, we cannot tell. Enough that in it the Son of Man speaks as with a sound of many waters, that by its banks there flourishes the tree whose leaves are for the healing of the nations, and that everything shall surely live whithersoever that river floweth.

CHAPTER III

THE CHRIST OF ROMANCE

The term "romance" has æsthetic rather than religious associations. We are accustomed to compare the romantic and the classical in art and literature. The classical spirit, we say, seeks to express itself in balance, restraint, symmetry, and self-sufficingness. Disdainful of eccentricity and changing fashions, exalted above everything feverish, turbulent, irrational, or accidental, it endeavours to set forth beauty in its essential and universal form, and to represent worthily the austere remoteness, the timeless serenity, the satisfying fullness and finality, of all perfect and eternal things. Such is the spirit which has given to the world the plays of Sophocles and the Odes of Horace, the Elgin marbles and the pictures of Mantegna, Gluck's operas and Handel's oratorios, the stately proportions of St. Paul's cathedral, the grace and elegance of Pope's poetry, the Olympian unimpassioned calm of Goethe.

The romantic spirit, on the other hand, delights in freshness, variety, and spontaneity. It loves whatever is exceptional, distinctive, unique, and greatly prefers the palpitating fervours of the glowing and vehement imagination, in art, to the chaste coldness and repose of the contemplative understanding. That which classical art holds at arm's

length, as it were, in order to observe it with complete detachment and from the standpoint of universal humanity, romantic art clasps passionately and personally to its bosom. All bondage to law, measure, sanity, self-restraint, it instinctively abhors, and claims the right to wander, to luxuriate, to be free, original, even audacious. Where classicism is conservative, romanticism would make all things new. For the beauty of order it would substitute the beauty of surprise, a beauty to be discovered and loved, not in calm lucidity of soul, but only in the more perfervid moods of emotional and imaginative inspiration. Such, throughout history, is the romantic spirit, as we see it manifesting itself in the Greek Anthology and the legends of King Arthur, in Gothic architecture and Provençal poetry, in Corot's paintings and Chopin's nocturnes, in Keats's "Isabella and the Pot of Basil," and the rich mediæval tapestries of Morris and Burne-Jones.

These varying characteristics, which belong primarily to art, have their counterpart in religion also. From the classical standpoint, religion is something fixed, unalterable, stereotyped, eternal, "as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be." From the romantic standpoint, it is something that wells up spontaneously from within the heart, as a new wonder and perpetually fresh discovery, a free, unimpeded voyaging of the soul in hitherto uncharted realms of spiritual exploration. These two contrasted types are broadly represented by authority and freedom, tradition and reformation, orthodoxy and heterodoxy, the clear open daylight of Catholic institutionalism and dogma and the

sensitively flickering and lambent flame of the inner light granted to the Quakers.

I

If we approach the study of the life of Christ with these distinctions present in our minds, to which type on the whole will He be found to conform? Surely to the romantic. Jesus, though He inaugurated a universal religion, set up no abstract or impersonal standard of perfection. His mode of thinking was not classical or formal. Rather, everything He said or did came from a divine prompting of inwardness and spontaneity, as the complete expression of personal self-utterance and self-unfolding. How is it that we so often think of Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King, and so seldom speak of Him as the supreme Poet? Yet His whole outlook on the world, its flowers, its birds, its corn-fields, its variegated humanity, was richly charged with imaginative and romantic feeling.*

The teaching of Jesus was no less romantic than His personality. Classicism was represented by the legalism of the Pharisees, who were guardians of tradition, champions of orthodoxy, sticklers for the observance of every jot and tittle of an authoritatively prescribed ritual. But Jesus insisted that the Kingdom of God was within men, and He urged them to avoid everything stereotyped and mechanical in their devotions. One simple prayer, welling up naturally from a loving heart, and breathed in secret

* For a suggestive study of Christ in His romantic aspect, see Oscar Wilde's *De Profundis*, pp. 63 ff.

into the ear of the all-seeing Father, was worth many displays of piety in public. Externalism in religion offered to men a broken cistern that could hold no water. Jesus promised to be *in* men, a well of water springing up unto everlasting life. When He said that, and when He affirmed that the Spirit of God was like the wind which bloweth where it listeth, Jesus spoke the language of romanticism.

Moreover, the career of Jesus, no less than His teaching and His divine personality, was romantic. Here was an obscure carpenter of Nazareth, His face still radiant from beholding the opened heavens, who stepped into the gaze of men and undertook, single-handed, or with the help of a few unlettered fishermen, to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. And He did it joyously, even gaily, like a happy bridegroom among his friends, or (as the catacombs of Rome afterwards represented Him to be) like a very Orpheus, preparing to build the City of God itself by the mere enchantment of His song. Was ever anything more adventurously romantic? And when the clouds and shadows gathered round Him, and for the flowers which caressed His feet in Galilee there were exchanged the thorns which pierced His brow in Jerusalem, even then the romantic spirit did not depart from Him. Jesus, indeed, was never more romantic than when He hung upon the cross, giving all for love, and delivered over to death by the organised religion of His day. When we think of the marred visage presented there, despised and rejected, spit upon and reviled, and compare it with the serene countenance of a Jupiter or an Apollo, we feel how

infinitely superior, though it be without form or comeliness, is that sublime figure, romantic even in the act of dying, to the well-poised, self-sufficing, and exquisitely proportioned deities of classical Greece and Rome.

II

A romantic interpretation of the life and personality of Christ is everywhere present in our four canonical Gospels. These are written in a spirit of reverent wonder and naive childlikeness which make an irresistible appeal to us. Especially is this true of the narratives of the birth and infancy of Christ in Luke and Matthew. The meek shepherds, the choirs of exulting angels, the distant Magi bringing precious gifts, the fierce and scowling Herod in the background, the unconcerned populace crowding to the inn at Bethlehem, the lowing cattle and the humble manger, with mother Mary in the midst, straining her little darling to her breast—these, the heart feels, are poetical and romantic accompaniments which fittingly adorn the tale of the coming of the Son of God into the world. If the hand of critical scholarship should ever remove any of these beautiful details from the picture which we love, the hand of reverent and adoring piety would immediately restore them. Why is it that every year we whole-heartedly surrender ourselves to the Christmas spirit, with its endearing associations of holly and mistletoe and childlike fantasy and romantic legend? We do this because we instinctively feel that we cannot rightly respond to the fact of the Incarnation save in the mood of simple

imaginative wonder. Something impels us to invest with the glamour of poetical emotion that which is given to us intellectually in the creeds and dogmas of the Church; and in so doing we yield, and yield rightly, to romantic sentiment.

But if the luxuriating fancy of religious faith is permitted to range freely within the covers of the New Testament, much more does it take the liberty of disporting itself in the pages of the uncanonical or apocryphal Gospels. Here the imaginative embellishment of the life of Christ is carried to extreme lengths, man's ineradicable love of the marvellous is gratified to the full, and tales of romantic wonder are naively supplied where the sacred record itself was felt to be provokingly and unwarrantably silent. We must not approach these childlike stories in the spirit of rationalising and captious criticism. They fail, of course, to impress the modern mind, because they introduce a false and artificial element into a narrative which is marvellous enough already. Yet they bear witness to the fact that the Church, in its reverence for Christ, cannot and need not abandon the romantic attitude. The spiritual imagination is claimed by Christ no less than the emotions and the will, and it insists upon its rights. These simple stories and ingenious fancies add nothing to our knowledge of the life of Christ, but they tell us a great deal about those who loved Him. After all, there is an aspect of Christ's glory which eludes the scholarly critic and the dogmatic theologian, but which reveals itself readily to babes and sucklings. By all means, in our effort to understand Christ, let us pursue the path of minute

exegetical research ; but let us not on that account ignore or despise the contribution which is made by sacred legend to the complete interpretation of His personality and influence.

III

Between the early days of Christianity and the Middle Ages the romantic interpretation of Christ suffered a decline. During this period the enormous significance of His coming into the world was being explored and unfolded in other directions. Thus, the missionary interest in Christ was for a long time paramount ; it was necessary that the good news of the world's salvation should be proclaimed everywhere. This was especially the Jewish contribution. Parallel with this, as we have seen, there grew up an intellectual interest in Christ. The problems raised for the mind by His person and work had to be reasoned out in prolonged theological discussion and finally formularised in creeds. This may be designated the Greek contribution to Christian history. In addition there was an ever growing practical and institutional interest. The heavenly grace bestowed in Jesus upon mankind must be widely distributed, as by irrigating channels, through a carefully organised and closely compacted system of ministry and sacraments. This was peculiarly the Roman contribution.

Such matters were to occupy the attention of the Church for many generations, almost to the exclusion of every other. But in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, among the races of northern Europe, the long-repressed romantic interest began to reassert

itself and to take a dominant place. For this there may have been two reasons. On the one hand, the classical point of view was for the time being weakened, if not wholly submerged, owing to the barbarian invasions of the Empire during the Dark Ages. On the other hand, the new northern nations now admitted to the fold of the Church brought with them a predominantly romantic genius and a great wealth of romantic sentiment and tradition. The Celts, Teutons, Normans, and Scandinavians, who during the early part of the Middle Ages gradually absorbed Latin and Greek culture through the Church, still retained their inborn love of the marvellous. A predilection for poetry and romance had been nourished amid the dim twilights and stormy rigours of their cold northern climate for centuries, and had already found expression in imperishable treasures of myth, legend, and folk-lore. At the same time there came to the west the richly fabulous splendours of Ophir the Golden and Arabia the Blest, as the result of contact with Saracen Mohammedanism. All these streams of influence mingled their waters in the Latin-Frankish kingdom of Gaul in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the period of troubadours and minnesingers, of *chansons de geste* and Provençal song, when the study of Latin was relegated to the cloister, and in every banqueting hall and lady's chamber the Romance languages for the first time came into their own.

The characteristic virtues of the time were favourable to romanticism. It was the period of feudalism, when king and count, knight and squire, villein and serf, secured themselves against the

perils of a turbulent and unsettled age by mutual vows of troth and fealty, protection and obedience. It was also the age of chivalry, when incessant feuds called into existence an exacting code of valour, honour, and knightly hardihood. Finally, it was an age of gallantry and courtly love. When fighting was laid aside, poetry and song and dalliance became the order of the day. In every respect the later Middle Ages were highly coloured and extraordinarily complex. They mingled courtesy with cruelty, the blandishments of love with the brutalities of war. Pillage and slaughter, lust and greed, went hand in hand with ascetic piety and the building of cathedrals. Amid all we are fascinated by a waving of banners, the flash of shields, pageants, love-philtres, enchanted castles, the coming and going of knights and troubadours, the joyous animation of jousts and tournaments.

Into this world there came the Galilean. It was a strange meeting. What had Jesus of Nazareth in common with Deirdre and Cuchullan, Siegfried and Brynnhilde, Tristan and Isolde? In a sense it was an alien world, for none of the virtues above mentioned has any necessary connection with Christianity. Nevertheless, it was an attractive world, of which something noble obviously might be made. The love of home, honour, valour, chastity, truth-speaking, was at least a good foundation for the Christian character, and promised results not always to be met with in more southern climes. It was to be the work of Jesus to make the most of these pagan excellencies, and to graft upon them finer graces of His own.

The impact of Christ upon the romantic imagination of the north may be seen first of all in the Crusades. Certain secular and political aims no doubt mingled with these enterprises, but their leading motive was religious. What fired the zeal of the first crusaders in the eleventh century was a consuming passion to rescue the sepulchre of Christ from paynim defilement, and so win absolution from sin, increase of grace, and victory's final crown of righteousness. Such a method of showing love to the Saviour of mankind may not greatly appeal to us to-day. Carnage and Christ do not go well together, and it seems strange that those who professed to serve Him should glory in making the streets of Jerusalem red with the blood of His supposed enemies on the very anniversary of the day on which He cried, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Yet we must not expect from an age more than it can give. The Crusades exercised a profound influence over the romantic idealism of the Middle Ages, and in Godfrey of Bouillon and King Louis of France they produced two of the noblest figures in the whole history of Christianity.

The spell cast by Christ over the military romanticism of the Middle Ages may also be seen in the formation of the Knights Templars. "Our word," so ran the prologue to their monastic rule, "is directed primarily to all who despise their own wills and with purity of mind desire to serve under the supreme and veritable King." There is something attractive in this *religio militaris* of mediæval monasticism engaged in holy warfare in the service of Mother Church. Solemnly invested with snow-

white robe and gleaming armour, after the cleansing bath of purification and a night of lonely vigil by Christ's altar, the Templars eagerly rode forth to do valiantly and to establish righteousness in the earth. They suffered no idle speech to pass their lips, glanced aside to no love of woman, never looked back with self-indulgent longing to the worldly life they had left behind, but willingly gave themselves to watching and to prayer, and to unswerving obedience to the Grand Master of their order, as unto Christ Himself. Surely, among the many crowns which adorn the brow of Jesus, the romantic chaplet which has been placed there by the military orders of the Middle Ages is not the least honourable and glorious.

Once more the romantic influence of Christ on the Middle Ages is seen in the legends which thickly cluster round the Holy Grail. At first this was only a wonder-working talisman, with heathen cultural associations, the touch of which miraculously cured sufferers from all their ills or inexhaustibly supplied food and drink to such as were in need. More and more, however, under Christian influences, it came to symbolise the presence of Christ in the sacrament, the ineffable joys of the eucharistic feast, and the unearthly boon of union with the Redeemer in the beatific vision. On those who were worthy and pure of heart the Grail could confer blessings unimaginable, but it brought judgment and disaster upon the proud. Malory's descriptions of the appearance of the Grail to the knights of King Arthur are of surpassing beauty. The sight of it was granted to no mere earthly prowess. After years of quest and

painful sacrifice a holy man might well be content to catch one fleeting glimpse of it, and then die.

Such a romantic conception of Christ may not appeal to us to-day. Its ascetic other-worldliness, its dreamy phantasmal vagueness may repel us. We may feel, even, that mediæval romanticism foisted upon Christ a pagan character which did not properly belong to Him, and endeavoured to secure a Christian baptism for thoroughly heathen and pre-Christian virtues. Yet Christ has never disdained to speak to men in the language they know best, and He came to hallow *all* our nobler qualities, the virile and masterful among the rest. To the mediæval warrior valour, courtesy, and good breeding were gifts of Christ, to be used faithfully in His holy serivce. As a priest of God put it to Sir Launcelot, when he had betrayed his trust, " In all the world men shall not find one knight to whom our Lord hath given so much grace as He hath given thee, for He hath given thee fairness with seemliness, He hath given thee wit and discretion to know good and evil, He hath given thee prowess and hardiness, and given thee to work so largely that thou hast had all days the better, wheresomever thou camest ; and now our Lord will suffer thee no longer, but that thou shalt know Him whether thou wilt or nilt."

IV

The romantic interpretation of Christ reached its modern culmination in Wagner's *Parsifal*. Already in *Tannhaüser* and *The Flying Dutchman*, in *Lohengrin*, *Tristan and Isolde*, and *The Niebelungen Ring*,

Wagner had uttered the very soul of Teutonic mythology. Now in *Parsifal* he was to take the noblest legend of mediæval romanticism and to spiritualise it beyond itself by infusing into it a large measure of Christian sentiment. The Parsifal of Wagner is much more than the old Grail-seeking hero of romance. He has become an impersonation of Christ Himself. As the pure and innocent knight who has become perfected through suffering and learned wisdom through obedience, he is able to enter sympathetically into the sin of Amfortas and also to resist the blandishments of Kundry and so to become the deliverer of both. There is a directly suggested parallel between the Christ of the Gospels and the Parsifal of romance in the scene of the foot-washing in Wagner's opera, and also in the personal appearance of the chief figure.

Wagner wrote *Parsifal* as a protest against the prevailing materialism of nineteenth century Germany, and it is a striking modern testimony to man's ineradicable sense of the corruption and misery wrought by sin, and the need of some kind of deliverance through redemption. What is most remarkable, however, is that Wagner should press this strange combination of Teutonic mythology and Christian sacramental mysticism into the service of philosophic pessimism. When he composed *Parsifal*, Wagner was deeply read in the works of Schopenhauer. The universe, in his conception, embodied a blind, egoistic, self-assertive Will-to-live that could not bear thinking of, so great was the suffering it caused everywhere. The only relief for the disillusioned soul was in the voluntary renuncia-

tion of that aggressive egoism on which the whole fabric of modern civilisation rests, and in the compassionate exercise of mercy, toleration, and universal loving-kindness. To Wagner it seemed proper that Christ should be conceived romantically, in the person of Parsifal, and in theatrical rather than ecclesiastical surroundings, as the chief protagonist of this liberating spirit.

No one who has had the privilege of listening to this opera, adequately performed, is likely to forget the profound spiritual impression which it is calculated to produce. The romantic glamour, the deep solemnity, the richly suggested mysticism, the never-failing floods of enchanting music, leave both sense and spirit drenched and overwhelmed. Yet from a theological point of view *Parsifal* is disappointing. The Jesus of history could never have sympathised with Schopenhauer's pessimism, or with a view of the universe so fundamentally atheistic. To Him God was no blind or fatalistic Will-to-live, but an all-wise and ever-loving Father. As for man, his chief malady in the eyes of Jesus was not suffering so much as sin, and therefore what he most needed was not fellow-feeling but rather inward regeneration and divine redemption. The defect of Parsifal's redemption was that it was not divine at all, but only human. Parsifal redeemed himself. Hence it is that a depressing air of sad and melancholy yearning broods over the whole opera. It issues in no climax of ringing gladness which a work dealing with redemption ought to do. Atonement is there, but without any joy of resurrection following. So saturated is it with weak sentimentality that

Nietzsche, in the interests of a more virile conception of Jesus, quarrelled violently with Wagner and his "snuffling gabble about Christianity," as a modern critic phrases it. No experience could be more salutary than to pass from the enfeebling mystic sensuousness of Wagner's *Parsifal*, beautiful though it be in its own way, to the bracing sincerity, strong religious feeling, and soul-inspiring strains of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*.

V

It remains to add a few words on recent and contemporary tendencies. These of course are very difficult to distinguish. The present age appears to be groping in several new directions. Disinclined for classicism because of its formal element, suspicious of romanticism because of its sentimental tinge, tired even of its own child, realism, the inevitable embodiment in art of the scientific spirit, our epoch seems to be turning hopefully in the direction of impressionism, symbolism, and social propagandism. These influences may give rise to a new romantic movement later on.

In the meantime it is instructive to recall the conditions which prevailed during the Great War. It was then revealed, to the surprise and concern of the Churches, how little the masses of the population had really been influenced by the Christian faith. The men in the trenches, even those brought up in Sunday-schools and brotherhoods, showed themselves appallingly ignorant of the fundamental principles of historical and dogmatic Christianity. The *classical* interpretation of Christ, that is to say,

which the Church had so sedulously offered to them for a generation, had made comparatively little impression upon their minds. It was impossible, however, that men should tear themselves from home and country, and embark on a hazardous and warlike enterprise, without some religious sentiments being stirred within them. When their spiritual emotions were thus spontaneously and naturally evoked, what form did they take? To what aspect of Christ did men feel themselves drawn? Not to the institutional or dogmatic Christ, but to the *romantic* Christ. They went back to the spirit of the Crusades. There was the same dumb yearning that Christ should grant His blessing on their arms, and impart His aid in securing victory, or at least preservation, in the day of battle. There was the same dedication of regimental flags in parish churches, the same Christian baptism of the military and heroic virtues of honour, courage, chivalry, and self-sacrifice. In the tumult of the campaign the most popular hymns for parade services were those which set forth Christ in some romantic aspect. At cross-roads, or by the wayside, miraculously preserved calvaries made their irresistible and mute appeal to the flagging spirits of our men. Some verses published in *Poems of To-day*, entitled "Christ in Flanders," show clearly how the average Tommy, who never thought of Christ in England—He was too unreal, too far away—became genuinely interested in Him when at the front.

> You helped us pass the jest along the trenches—
> Where, in cold blood, we waited in the trenches—
> You touched its ribaldry and made it fine.

At home, the pictures which were most popular represented the dying soldier as sharing the supreme sacrifice of the cross, or as conscious of Christ's mystic presence in his latest hour. And when the war was over, and memorials were erected to the dead in every public square or village green, it is safe to say that it was not dogmatic faith or evangelical experience, but rather a vague romantic feeling, that caused the figure of Christ crucified to be made conspicuous on so many monuments.

The typical soldier's attitude to Christ thus indicated may be pathetically defective on its theological side. It may show a complete lack of historical perspective and of spiritual insight into the deeper meaning of His personality and mission. Yet it is significant as showing the trend of average opinion. The modern man is not indifferent to Christ, but he seems to wish to get behind the traditional and conventional account of Him, to "correct the portrait by the living Face." If the Churches have largely lost their grip to-day, it may be because they have offered to the world an emasculated Christ, and given the impression that the more venturous and virile virtues, which the common man best understands, have no place at all within the Christian scheme of things. The time seems to be ripe for a new movement which will set Christ in the forefront once again in His romantic aspect, as Captain and Leader of the host of modern chivalry in bringing in a new and better order for mankind. "Christ keeps His hold upon the world and will keep it," wrote a keen observer and passionate lover of his fellow-men, "not because He is God-

man or man-God, not because He was born normally or abnormally, not because He redeemed the world or didn't, not because He provided a refuge for souls on their beam-ends ; but because, of all great historic and legendary figures, He is the one who convinces us that He was never afraid. In Him courage and pluck were the same thing, and perfect." *

Romanticism, of course, has its own peculiar weaknesses and defects. "I call the classical *healthy*," wrote Goethe, "and the romantic *sickly*." John Foster thought that romanticism involved an unwarrantable subjection of the judgment to the imagination. There can be no doubt that it tends to an extravagance of egoism, arbitrariness, and caprice. In the sacred name of liberty and unimpeded self-expression it cherishes fanaticism and hallows all kinds of aimless and vagabond desires. Follow romanticism beyond just limits and you are led to the sloppy morass of subjective emotionalism and vapid sentiment. Carry the principle of classicism to excess, and you find yourself in the barren wilderness of cold propriety or mere decorum. What we should seek is a blending of the two. The classical spirit tends to absorb the romantic, changing its eager zest into mature wisdom ; yet ever it ripens within itself the precious seed of some new movement of romanticism again.

In Jesus Christ, surely, both tendencies find their ideal fulfilment. On the one hand, He is timeless and eternal, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the abiding, changeless, universal Lord,

* Stephen Reynolds, *A Poor Man's House*, p. 121.

"the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." This is the Christ whose classical aspect is presented to us in the creeds and ceremonies and institutions of the Church. On the other hand, this same eternal and unchanging Christ perpetually renews Himself, romantically, in the souls of them that love Him, and leads them into ever new realms of spiritual adventure and enfranchisement and wonder. The classical Christ is pre-eminently the Christ of age, experience, and authority. The romantic Christ is the Christ of youth.

CHAPTER IV

THE CHRIST OF CATHOLICISM

THE Christ of fully-developed Roman Catholicism is an intensely fascinating and impressive figure. David and Isaiah, Plato and Aristotle, Mithra and Osiris, no less than Augustine and Aquinas, Cyprian and Leo, Francis of Assisi and Bernard of Clairvaux, have helped to build up that vast system in which, as King of saints, He sits enthroned. Such a Christ bears manifest traces of all He has passed through. In the course of ages He has become standardised by authority, idealised by art, subtilised by philosophy, popularised by superstition, and above all glorified by the passionate adoration of martyrs and confessors without number. As His worshippers love Him in the Mass, Christ is the surviving victor in many a fierce controversy, with Gnosticism, with Arianism, with Adoptianism, with Socinianism, and the marks of all these conflicts are still upon Him. Not a gesture of the priest before the altar, not a vestment which he wears, but tells of some conquest won, some grace bestowed, some dogma established, in the far-off days of long ago. All that is most wonderful in the Church's history, its rejection of polytheism in one generation and of pantheism in another, its capacity for absorbing everything that was most vital in Greek culture and in Roman disci-

pline, its patient education of the northern barbarians, its enrichment under mediævalism, its antipathy towards Modernism and Socialism, its resolute stand against every form of heresy and schism, its marvellous instinct for utilising the highest achievements of human genius while at the same time it accommodates itself to the manifold weaknesses and frailties of our mortal nature, are somehow brought together, and blended, in that wistfully gazing and enigmatic figure which hangs suspended upon every Roman crucifix.

I

Our first impression of the Catholic system as a whole is that Christ is there seen in a setting of *institutionalism*. He is not to be known, that is to say, save through the visible Church, which is a vast and most complicated international organisation, with a carefully graded spiritual hierarchy, a fixed canon law, extensive political claims, and a stern, unyielding, penitential discipline. Jesus Christ is not so much enclosed within this system as identified with it. As its unseen Head He imposes on every part of it the *imprimatur* of His supernatural sanction and authority. "The visible Church is the Son of God as He continually appears, ever repeats Himself, and eternally renews His youth among men in human form. It is His perennial incarnation." * The Church, in this conception, is the divinely appointed instrument for the expression of the mind of Christ and the fulfilment of His will. All its infinite ramifications in every place are as it

* Möhler, *Symbolik*, p. 332.

were the nerves and integuments of His body. Every decision or authoritative act of the Church carries with it the full weight of His original revelation, which it but unfolds. The Church is both custodian and agent of the truth as it is in Jesus. What it gives, He gives ; what it withholds, He withholds. Outside the visible Church of Christ, therefore, there can be no covenanted redemption for mankind, and rival schismatic organisations claiming to speak in His name must not for a moment be tolerated or recognised. One only ark exists for the rescuing of men from the stormy engulfing sea of sin, error, doubt, and infidelity. This being so, the first Christian virtue required of the faithful is that of submission to recognised authority. The believer must learn to say, with Newman's Gerontius :

> And I hold in veneration,
> For the sake of Christ alone,
> Holy Church as His creation,
> And her teachings as His own.

From the point of view of Evangelical Protestantism, which would bring all developments of Christianity to the test of its pure origin, this whole system must be condemned as a complete perversion of the mind and will of Christ. Jesus of Nazareth, it is claimed, could not possibly recognise Himself as Head of a system of hierarchical monarchianism. He founded a Kingdom not of this world, and left to His Church no rigid ecclesiastical system, but only a free indwelling Spirit. During His earthly ministry He showed the greatest distrust of political machinery as a means of propagating His Gospel,

and He warned His disciples against the love of precedence shown by the rulers of the world. His whole conception of religion, we are told, was mystical rather than institutional, and the forces He most trusted were those of the Spirit working in perfect liberty. Whenever possible He rebuked the persecuting intolerance of those who would call down fire on their adversaries because they followed not with them. To all such He said "Ye know not the spirit ye are of." How then could He approve an institution which rejects many whom He would obviously welcome, and welcomes many whom He would almost certainly reject?

In such a view, then, Catholicism is rather a falsification than a true representation of the religion of Jesus Christ. According to Dean Inge, the Roman Church is "the last creative achievement of classical antiquity. . . . Its growth belongs mainly to the political history of Europe; the strictly religious element in it is quite subordinate. There is, as Modernist critics have seen, a real breach between the Palestinian Gospel and the elaborate mystery religion, with its graded hierarchy, its Roman organisation, its Hellenic speculative theology, which achieved the conquest of the Empire in the fourth century." * Harnack similarly accuses the Church of Rome of simply perpetuating, on regimental, autocratic lines, the Cæsarism which it displaced. "Its Popes rule like Trajan and Marcus Aurelius; Peter and Paul have taken the place of Romulus and Remus; the bishops and archbishops, of the proconsuls; the troops of priests and monks correspond

* W. R. Inge, *Outspoken Essays* (First Series), pp. 252–253.

to the legions ; the Jesuits to the imperial body guard." *

To all these charges the Catholic may reply that the nature of a religion is to be determined, not by its first embryonic form, however divinely given, but by that into which it grows. It may be true that Catholic Christianity is in many respects not recognisably the same as the Christianity of the New Testament. But development has been forced upon the Church by the circumstances of its history ; and, by every legitimate test which can be applied, that development has been continuous and harmonious and overruled throughout by the Holy Spirit. The original Messianic form which the Gospel first assumed could not possibly be maintained after the early apocalyptic expectations had been disappointed. What then ? It became the duty of the Church to adapt the Gospel to the Roman Empire in such a way as to enable Christ to dominate that Empire. Could anything better, indeed, have happened than what actually did happen ? For the preservation of unity, the definition of doctrine, the suppression of heresy, the education of the immature, the protection of the inner core of Christian truth and life in a rude age, a certain hardening of the outer shell of organisation was absolutely necessary.

Moreover, it is contended that a Catholic Christian institutionalism is as needful to-day as ever it was. Christianity claims to control the whole of life. Whereas Evangelicalism tends to save men's

* A. Harnack, *What is Christianity?* (Eng. Trans.), pp. 252–253. Compare Hobbes : "The Papacy is no other than the ghost of the deceased Roman Empire, sitting crowned upon the grave thereof" (*Leviathan*, part iv., chap. 47).

souls individually from a world otherwise perishing, Catholicism would embrace all human activities—art, science, politics, commerce, economics, industry—under religious sanctions, and seek to incorporate them in the Kingdom of God. This can only be done by a vast world organisation which, fully taking into account the variety of human capacity and need, authoritatively applies the principles of the Gospel to the entire life of man. The alternative organisation to the Church can be none other than a secular and soulless Socialism. If there could have existed in 1914, for example, an international institution united enough to have expressed, and influential enough to have enforced, the mind of Christ, would the Great War ever have taken place ?

II

But the Christ of Catholicism is not only placed in a setting of world-wide institutionalism, He is also made the centre of a vast and complicated system of *authoritative dogma*. Round Him has been constructed a view of the whole universe, which has been intellectually thought out by doctors and theologians, imaginatively commended by poets and artists and musicians, and devotionally accepted by the acclamations of consenting millions. According to this rendering of the cosmic drama, everything has been clearly planned out from the creation of the world to the Last Judgment and beyond. The Father sits enthroned among saints and angels ; in the depth beneath is the underworld of demons ; between them is man, dwelling on earth for a brief period of probation. God demands true holiness and

righteousness from man ; but, alas, original sin, inherited from Adam, prevents him from rendering these things as he ought, so that he is exposed to the just condemnation of his Creator. Jesus, however, the only begotten Son of God, graciously intervenes. By His sinless union with humanity in the Incarnation, the perfect sacrifice of His atoning death, and the crowning triumph of His resurrection to heavenly places, He became the world's Saviour, took upon Himself the curse due to sin, satisfied the demands of ideal righteousness, and opened the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers. The Christian life henceforth consists of the appropriation by the faithful of the overflowing stores of divine merit which, by the grace of Christ, are thus placed at their disposal through the covenanted channels. By these means, together with the due performance of penance and good works, mortal and venial sin may be overcome, hell cheated of its prey, purgatory endured, and the bliss of eternal life at last achieved.

The beauty and consistency of this vast mythological scheme have for ages cast their spell over the reason, the conscience, the imagination of mankind. In many respects it still commands our wondering admiration. No doubt, as the result of modern investigations into physics, history, psychology, and comparative religion, this naive and childlike view of the universe is slipping from us, and our conceptions of the relation of Christ to the cosmos will have to be modified accordingly. Yet the Catholic poetic dramatisation of world-history has immense imaginative as well as dogmatic value. It places a proper emphasis on the gravity of sin, on the soul's need of

forgiveness, and on the spontaneity and fullness of the divine redemption. It has the merit, too, of assigning to Christ Himself His rightful place of absolute supremacy and centrality and power. One may attend many Protestant services without so much as hearing about Christ at all, but no Catholic can ever be present at Mass without having his attention riveted on the Saviour of the world and His sacrifice on the cross for the souls of men.

Moreover, as Tyrrell contended, Catholicism is more true than Protestantism to the apocalyptic element in Jesus. The overthrow of Satan, the inevitable destruction of the present world-order, the coming of Christ in judgment and in glory, the final consignment of souls to endless woe or to everlasting bliss in a transcendent kingdom, all are here and in the foreground. The *immediacy* of the end has indeed rightly been sacrificed, but the spiritual values of Christ's apocalyptic outlook are conserved, as they have ceased to be in some forms of Liberal Protestantism, which, because of their prevailingly ethical and humanitarian interpretation of Christianity, have become rather a sociological than a religious force. Finally, Catholicism more than any other form of Christianity clings tenaciously to the 'numinous' element in Jesus, and by means of darkness, silence, and the help of supreme art endeavours to suggest that quality in Him of supernatural mystery and divine holiness which both fascinated and affrighted the first disciples.

This transcendental interpretation of Christ, however, has its attendant disadvantages. As the Second Person of a mysterious and abstract Trinity,

as both Victim and High Priest of the world's salvation, as King enthroned among exulting angels, as awful Judge at the coming of the *Dies Irae*, even as Redeemer within the sacramental wafer, Jesus is apt to become remote and inaccessible to the ordinary believer. One so regal and so majestical cannot properly be approached save through privileged persons, and the endless fumigations and posturings of court etiquette.

A natural result is the turning from such a Judge to the much more compassionate and tender Virgin Mary, Star of the Sea, Mother of Pity, Rest of the Weary, Rose without a Thorn. It is not difficult to understand, and in a measure to sympathise with, the veneration felt by Catholics for Our Lady. Mary came nearer to Jesus than any other. She bore Him and laid Him in a manger, nursed Him as a child, followed His career with anxious solicitude, and wept bitter tears, a *mater dolorosa*, over the final agony of Calvary. Quite apart from apocryphal legends, which only bedeck her fame with tawdry artificial flowers, she is endeared to us by the modesty and reticence which characterise her in the New Testament, and she well deserves that all generations should call her blessed.

It is an ungracious task, therefore, even to appear to criticise, on theological or historical grounds, the reverence bestowed on one whose serene benignity and grace have inspired the paintings of Raphael, the music of Elgar, and the passionate adoration of millions of broken hearts.* In an age of brutal

* See, for example, Dante's wonderful prayer to Mary at the close of the *Paradiso*, and its reappearance at the beginning of Chaucer's *Second Nun's Tale*.

instincts and coarse manners the love of Mary has cherished the softer virtues and taught men chivalry and respect for womanhood. To women themselves she has presented the divine ideal of a mother's tenderness, a maiden's purity, and a wife's fidelity. Yet the Catholic doctrine of the immaculate conception and perpetual virginity of Mary totally ignores the fact that she gave birth to four sons and more than one daughter by her marriage with Joseph, and it cannot be denied that as Universal Mother and Queen of Heaven she has carried into the Christian Church some of the attributes and honours which properly belong to Cybele and Astarte, to Venus and Diana. It is a monstrous perversion of the Gospel narrative to represent her as more compassionate than Christ Himself. Yet it is precisely on this assumption that she holds the place she does in Catholic devotion. "The Madonna is simpler than Christ, she is nearer to one's heart ; there are no contradictions in her, she does not threaten with Gehenna ; she only loves, pities, forgives. It is easy for her to make captive a woman's heart for life." * Mary reigns and will continue to reign as a symbol of sex-sublimation, and as an index of man's deep craving for something indulgent to human weakness in his conception of the divine. She does not actually take the place of her Son in Catholic worship, but she obscures His glory ; and the rank assigned to her in popular devotion indicates the extent to which, in Catholicism, Christ's own nature and true significance have been misunderstood.

* Maxim Gorky, *Tales of Two Countries*, pp. 36–37.

III

The seeming remoteness of a dogmatically conceived and institutionally presented Christ, however, is almost wholly overcome in Catholicism by a lavish use of *sacramental symbolism*. In marked contrast to the bareness of Protestantism, Catholic worship freely enlists the services of art in commending the mysteries of religion to devout believers. Jesus Christ speaks indirectly and silently to His observant people in the lighted candles which gleam upon the altar, in its holy utensils and vases of silver flowers, in the sacred symbols woven into priestly vestments, in golden and blue mosaics which make the sanctuary glorious, and in the emblematic carvings which everywhere adorn pillars and arches and window traceries. He reminds them of Himself in the kissed relic, the holy water, the oft-repeated sign of the cross, the everywhere suspended crucifix, and the carved beads of the well-fingered rosary. Jesus Christ further becomes accessible to men in the ceremonial blessing of fisheries and orchards, in the granting of indulgences at holy places, in the celestial currency and exchange of the merits of the saints, and in a system of sacraments suited to every stage of life's pilgrimage from the cradle to the grave.

It is very noticeable that, while in Protestant worship Jesus Christ is made to stand alone, in relation to believers, there is a manifest desire in Catholic worship to set Him worthily *among His friends*. The Virgin Mother is always close at hand ; saints and prophets, martyrs and apostles,

doctors and evangelists, are never far away ; around Him is a cloud of adoring angels and archangels ; from heaven's great arch God the Father beams beneficent upon His well-beloved Son. Even the sweet and beautiful things of nature are freely drawn upon to suggest Christ symbolically to the devout imagination, as the poetry of the Church abundantly testifies.

Frondis, floris, nucis, roris,
Pietati salvatoris
Congruunt mysteria.
Frons est Christus protegendo,
Flos dulcore, nux pascendo,
Ros cœlesti gratia.*

This sacramental symbolism, of course, culminates in the ritual of the Mass, and in the visible elevation, amid adoring silence, save for the tinkling of a bell, of the most sacred mystery of the Church's faith, the Real Presence of Christ in the consecrated wafer. "In the divine sacrifice which is celebrated in the Mass," says the voice of authority, "that same Christ is contained and immolated in an unbloody manner who once offered Himself in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross ; and this sacrifice is truly propitiatory." † Here the sacramentalism of the Church reaches its supreme climax. Everything else in Catholic worship is intended to lead up to this hushed and solemn moment. That the Saviour of the world and King of glory, who once in

* "The mysteries of leafage, flower, nut, dew, are suited to the Saviour's tender love. The foliage by its protecting is Christ, the flower is Christ by its sweetness, the nut as it yields fruit, the dew by its celestial grace."—ADAM OF ST. VICTOR, twelfth century.

† *Conc. Trid.*, sess. xxii., cap. 2.

humble guise was born of a pure virgin, walked through the fields of Galilee, worked at a carpenter's bench, and suffered a shameful death upon the cross, but who now reigns with the Father in glory everlasting, should stoop from heaven at the consecrating word and visibly manifest Himself to His faithful worshippers, is a miracle of condescension which no other form of Christianity provides. It is not surprising that such a mystery should be acknowledged in Catholicism with reverential awe, and that "Blessed be God" should be the only words which overflowing hearts can bring themselves to utter when the silence of ecstasy at last is broken.

Here again there is material for endless controversy. The Evangelical would say that the worship of Christ in the Mass is partly idolatry and partly a surrender to irreligious magic. He would urge that there is no place in the New Testament for a sacrificing priesthood; that the doctrine of transubstantiation is a gross survival of the most pagan elements of primitive religion; and that the eucharist ought to be a common meal partaken of by all present, and not an oblation offered by one only. "Christianity is not an æsthetic religion, it is an ethical. At the centre of its worship is not a magical act of God but a moral, in whose nature every Christian must share with an active partnership, and not a passive presence. Its worship centres in an active Saviour who is more than a godly spectacle. The death of Christ was God's supreme act. . . . Ritually it is expressed in a communion and not a Mass; in a communion shared, and not a sacrifice offered; in a communion act in which all

who form the Church equally partake, and not in a ceremony where the real actors are but the few." *

To a Catholic all such arguing is vain. The Protestant, he will say, for all his talk, worships a phantasmal and an absent Christ, who recedes ever farther into the dim recesses of the past. Catholics alone experience the joy of actually meeting with and worshipping their incarnate Lord, and of receiving at His hands the boon of a definite, authoritative, individually applied, and *contemporary* forgiveness. How real this presence of Christ can be we may judge from the hymn of Francis of Assisi : " Oh, how pure and worthy should be the priest who touches the living, glorified Jesus. Let the whole earth tremble, let heaven thrill with joy, when Christ the Son of God descends upon the altar."

IV

Very important in Catholicism is its conception of the relation of Christ to the whole body of *popular religious cultus*. Protestantism tends to lay the greatest emphasis on the individual and inward aspects of Christian faith. Catholicism, while by no means undervaluing these things, calls attention to the equal importance of faith's corporate and external aspects. The Evangelical is prone to regard the Church as a society which a man enters through conscious personal adhesion, as the result of conversion to faith in Christ. The Catholic, on the other hand, looks upon the Church, not as a select aggregation of self-conscious Christians, but as

* P. T. Forsyth, *Christ on Parnassus*, pp. 189–190.

a family into which one is introduced at birth, by the Church's baptism rather than by his own personal confession, a family whose already existing atmosphere of love he learns thankfully to share, and whose communal acts of fellowship he loyally practises, long before any clear understanding of their deeper significance is reached. As Canon Quick excellently puts it, " the Church cannot expect to be able to start from a Christian consciousness of God in all her members. She must provide plain rules of conduct and action for the majority, and, if these are wisely planned, the day may be looked for when a fully Christian consciousness may be developed both in the society as a whole and in the individuals who compose it." *

Moreover, while the Evangelical regards sacraments as no more than declaratory of spiritual realities which are independent of them, the Catholic holds that they are definitely effective and necessary as themselves the channels and instruments of grace. Pipes to convey water are just as indispensable as water to be conveyed through pipes. In this view, spiritual things are normally mediated to us, not apart from, but in, by, and through the body, the senses, the concrete, visible things of the visible world. God is not the God of the soul only, but of soul and body in divinely correlated union. The Catholic claims, then, that Christ may come to His own at subconscious levels, even through impersonal physical channels of suggestion, and it cannot be denied that he has a great deal of modern psychology on his side. One must be constantly on

* O. C. Quick, *Catholic and Protestant Elements in Christianity*, p. 50.

one's guard, however, lest subconscious channels be exalted above conscious as media of divine influence.

Whatever may be said, within the sphere of controversy, regarding the way in which the Christ of Catholicism is historically developed, institutionally presented, dogmatically conceived, and sacramentally conveyed, it must be admitted that He is passionately loved. We have only to read the language of the saints to be completely satisfied that no Catholic regards the creeds and ceremonies of the Church as in the slightest degree *obscuring* Christ, but rather thinks of them as effectively *revealing* Him in all His beauty. "As honey to the mouth," wrote Bernard of Clairvaux, "as melody in the ear, as a song of gladness to the heart, is the Name of Jesus. . . . Where is the man who, when labouring under doubt and uncertainty, has not had the clear shining of faith restored to him by the influence of the Name of Jesus? Or who has not found new vigour and resolution given to him at the sound of that Name full of help, when he was discouraged by adversities and almost ready to give way to them?"* It is related of Thomas Aquinas that the Master once said to him in a trance, "Thou hast written well of Me, Thomas. What recompense dost thou desire?" To this the saint could think of but one reply, "None other than Thyself, O Lord." We must never forget that it was Catholic Christianity which inspired the love of Christ felt by Francis of Assisi, that happy jongleur and troubadour of God, and by Thomas à Kempis, whose intimate outpour-

* *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, No. xv.

ings of spiritual affection have refreshed countless human hearts.

It is true that the love of Christ manifested in Catholicism has sometimes assumed extravagant and insipid forms. Especially among monks and nuns it has occasionally acquired an amatory and even an erotic character, and the scriptural employment of the metaphor of marriage as symbolic of the mystic communion of the soul with Christ has been carried to unseemly lengths. The allegorical interpretation of the Song of Songs, with its wealth of sensuous oriental imagery, has much to answer for in this connection. Jesus becomes, in the writings of Mechthild, of Hackeborn, and St. Teresa, a kind of heavenly Prince or Bridegroom who, accompanied by the dew of the morning and the singing of birds, sweetly visits the couch of His own when they are sick with love, and satisfies their longings with affectionate, ecstatic claspings and the kisses of His mouth.

A similar coarsening of the love of Jesus is seen in some phases of Catholic devotion to the Sacred Heart. In these, and in the images and pictures by which that bleeding heart is represented, Jesus is often made to appear a weak, an effeminate, and a sentimental figure. This emotionalism, however, is not confined to Catholic devotion, but may be found also in the gushing sentimentality of Samuel Rutherford's *Letters*, as well as in the language of many evangelical mission hymns.

V

The Catholic conception of Christ cannot be better studied than as it is set forth in Cardinal

Newman's *Dream of Gerontius*. Here He is a Being of transcendent majesty, who is related to all things that subsist through Him, from the height above to the depth beneath, from the beginning of history to its predestined end.

Highest of all, rank above rank, are the blessed hierarchies of angels and archangels. From far beneath there arises the infernal hubbub of hell's demonic hosts, who howl and snarl and jostle with one another, tortuously writhing in a malignancy of hate, raucously giving vent to the "sour and uncouth dissonance" of strife, and making themselves miserable by impotent and foiled attempts to thwart the eternal beatitude of the saints. In the midst is man, kindred to both saints and angels, groping his arduous and doubtful way in the dim twilight that is appropriate to faith, crippled by sin, condemned to a double agony of soul and sense, weak, fainting, bewildered, staggering to a fall, yet never without the redemptive visitings of grace. It is very noticeable that in this nobly conceived drama the entire universe, from top to bottom, is actively engaged in either furthering or foiling the accomplishment of man's salvation. The demons would fain drag him to their own abhorred level, but the good angels long to snatch him from nethermost burnings and from endless loss, that he may fill in heaven those seats from which the proud have fallen, and render that praise to the Creator which not even the seraphim but only the redeemed can give.

This anxious concern of good and evil claimants for the soul of man is especially concentrated upon the moment of his death. Newman's poem, like

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Catholic worship generally, is chiefly occupied with the last things. The cares and duties of our earthly pilgrimage are without doubt important in their way, but what is to happen when the earth itself and everything it contains shall vanish, and the shivering soul, bereft of all friendly and customary support, must take the great leap over the dizzy brink, and meet the accusations of the Recording Angel in the presence of a just and holy God ?

At the prospect of so critical an ordeal, pregnant with vastest issues, the soul is naturally shaken with shuddering dismay, " the masterful negation and collapse " of all that makes us man. Nothing can give support in such an awful hour save the firm recital of the Church's creed, the sacrament of Extreme Unction at the hands of God's appointed priest, and one last agonising cry, wrung from the despair of a sinking soul, to Mary, Joseph, and the saints, for their assisting prayers.

There follows immediately, in stupefying contrast to all this torment, the deep refreshing silence of the other world, the sleepy languorous awakening of the disembodied soul to a consciousness of " inexpressive lightness " within the grasp of God, its curious sensation of continuing to think in terms of time and space, though these are now no more, its mystical awareness of speeding with incredible velocity to the Throne of Light, under the guidance of its Guardian Spirit, even while the tones of the priest's last " subvenite " seem still to linger in its astonished ears.

It is here, within the House of Judgment, that Christ as Catholicism conceives Him finally appears.

We have already heard much of Him in other ways. Choirs of exulting angels rehearse His mighty deeds in the redemption of the world, praising unweariedly the Holiest in the height. Now we are admitted even to His seat. The Temple in which He sits enthroned is described symbolically as consisting, even in its friezes, balustrades, and pavements,

> Of holy, blessed and immortal beings
> Who hymn their Maker's praise continually.

Choirs of angels constitute the threshold of this temple, and mighty companies of the loftiest created spirits form avenues of approach to Him.

How then is Christ Himself depicted? He is infinitely holy, yet infinitely loving:

> The Judge severe e'en in the Crucifix.

A fire from His keen and awful sanctity scorches and shrivels every evil stain. Yet even in judgment He is the Christ of Calvary. The Angel of the Agony, who once stood by Him in Gethsemane, is once more beside Him to remind Him of His Passion, and to bespeak His pity on behalf of the justly condemned soul.

One swiftly piercing glance from this majestic Being, one momentary transport of beatific vision, one lightning flash of personal and holy judgment, informs the trembling spirit of the doom that awaits it in the age to come. But for the redeemed that is quite enough. The flame of Everlasting Love burns ere it transforms, but the bliss ineffable of being vouchsafed one glimpse of the incarnate, crucified, and exalted Lord is all that can be desired. Hence-

forth the soul is safe and happy, "consumed yet quickened by the glance of God," and perfectly reconciled to prolonged subsequent absence from Him till purgatory's cleansing and avenging fires shall have done their appointed work.

Cardinal Newman's conception of Christ is the legitimate and sublimated expression of the worship accorded to Him on every Catholic altar in Christendom. It is a marvellous expression of the thoughts which would naturally commend themselves to a good Catholic as he gazes with unutterable awe, love, pity, adoration, and self-loathing upon the crucifix itself. Yet somehow they leave the Evangelical with the uneasy feeling that the Christ who is here presented is ever so far away, and that many complicated influences, both celestial and terrestrial, must needs be set in motion before sinful man can be admitted to His presence.

VI

In Dostoevsky's wonderful book, *The Brothers Karamazov*, we have a very searching study of the Christ of Catholicism, under the form of an ironical indictment of the Jesus of history by a Grand Inquisitor who is none other than an aged cardinal of the Catholic Church itself. The charge brought against Christ is that He is too holy, unworldly, exacting in His demands to suit a world religion, and not sufficiently indulgent to the frailties of human nature. He is accused of proposing to bestow on men spiritual emancipation, and of giving them a religion without mystery, without external authority, and without signs and wonders. Such a religion

the peoples of earth cannot endure. The freedom it offers is too costly, and they prefer slavery. The Church accordingly has felt it to be her duty to correct these defects, in order to bring the religion of Christ more within the reach of ordinary people, and so to promote the happiness of humanity.

This is a fairly just representation of Catholic Christianity both in its weakness and in its strength. In the course of centuries, with a deep comprehension of the human heart, Catholicism has assimilated much of the pagan civilisations it has sought to supersede. In many cases, however, these have leavened the Church more than the Church could leaven them. A priestly religion, which offers assured spiritual blessings, on unimpeachable authority, by semi-magical means, to docile obedience and acquiescence, is apt to keep men in a state of contented ignorance and servile pupilage, and so to weaken their sense of moral responsibility and independence in the needful subjective initiatives of faith. This defect Evangelicalism corrects. Yet the essential Christ is mightily present in Catholicism, which is never content to *rest* in the outward, but desires rather to use it only as a means to the ultimate enrichment of the inner life. The Roman Church seeks in a thousand ways to accommodate its message to the needs and longings of average human nature. For this reason, more than any other, the Christ of Catholicism will never be dethroned. "Deep in the general heart of man His power survives."

CHAPTER V

THE CHRIST OF EVANGELICALISM

The full significance of the Reformation movement, like that of Christianity itself, was only very gradually apprehended. Luther and Calvin, Zwingli and Melanchthon, were in many respects nearer to the mediæval mind than to our own. They could not anticipate the logical and historical consequences of their own principles, and it is quite certain that, had they been able to foresee some modern developments arising out of the Reformation, they would have wholly disapproved of them. Though they repudiated certain aspects of Catholicism, they shared its general ideas regarding the state of man as corrupted by the Fall, the nature of Christianity as a divine redemption, and the importance to be attached to ecclesiastical discipline and confessional statements of belief.

Yet the Reformation did introduce a vital change, which was to have far-reaching results. So great an upheaval could not spend itself in a single earthquake shock. The first deep tremor of 1520, so to speak, was to be followed by echoing reverberations in 1660 and 1843. In this country of England Henry VIII. did not by any means carry to completion the task to which he had set his hand. He left much for Elizabeth to do, and William and

Mary, and even Victoria. Indeed, the end of these things is not yet. The Catholic and Evangelical conceptions of Christianity are still inextricably mingled in our national life. The Church of England, for example, is strangely and unstably compounded of both elements, and a great deal is now believed and practised in the name of the Protestant Reformation which is fundamentally incompatible with its central principle. Can we define what that principle was and is? What is precisely meant by Evangelicalism, as contrasted with Catholicism?

I

Let us begin by trying to state what the Reformation principle was not. In the first place it was no mere substitution of the Bible for the Church as the seat of authority in religion. The exigencies of controversy with Rome, no doubt, raised Scripture to a position of unique importance over against the hierarchy, and there was something to be said for Cartwright's phrase that the Bible is "the only religion of Protestants." Yet it came to be discerned that the Bible is not itself the final authority for the Christian religion, but rather the sphere within which that authority resides. According to Evangelical belief, the Bible is to be interpreted, not indeed by the Church which treasures it, nor yet by the tradition which has gathered round it, but by the indwelling light which it contains. The Reformation, in fact, was a return *through* the Bible to Christ and His Gospel as apprehended by the heart in believing faith.

Once more, the Reformation is not to be understood as a mere affirmation of private judgment in religion. Luther, it is true, affirmed both the right and the duty of such private judgment. He took up an attitude of rock-like defiance to the Roman hierarchy, and refused to budge from the positions imposed upon him by his own conscience. But that was only because his conscience itself had been surrendered to Christ in the obedience and humility of faith. What he sought to establish was no disintegrating or anarchical principle of mere individualism in religion, but rather the crown rights of the Redeemer within His own Church.

Again, it has recently been maintained by Professor Santayana that Protestantism, in rejecting the pagan elements which had invaded the Church from Hellenism, never really returned to a pre-Hellenic Christianity at all, but represents rather a movement which is essentially modern and Teutonic.* The Reformation, in this view, was the long-delayed answer of the northern nations of Europe to the offer of Latin Christianity made centuries before, an answer that amounted to a spiritual rejection, a declaration of independence. This interpretation has much to recommend it. In the depth and inwardness of the Protestant soul, its native love of spontaneity and freedom, its respect for individual personality and the voice of conscience, rather than for any external authority whatsoever, its practical energy and rude vigour, its sturdy self-reliance and spiritual immaturity, we seem to see the racial

* *Reason in Religion*, pp. 110 ff.

characteristics of the Teutonic nations struggling to assert themselves.

When all these things have been said, however, it remains true that the Reformation was primarily a religious movement, an attempt to recover the original simplicity of the Christian Gospel, and to disengage it from the choking accumulations that had gathered round it in the course of centuries. What Luther did, in effect, was to apply the hammer of God's Word to the Church of his time, in order to detach the Gospel kernel from the husk or shell of tradition in which it had been enclosed during the patristic and mediæval ages. He sought to bring men back to Christ Himself, especially in His cross, as the redeeming and renewing grace of God in action, the living, personal, and all-sufficing Saviour of every sinful or despairing soul.

This was a Christ whom Luther had failed to discover in Catholicism. In vain had he searched for Him in the sterile dogmas, the prescribed rituals, the elaborate penitential system, the austere morality, the self-mortifying asceticism which the Church had offered in the name of Christ. Through many a nightly vigil, and again on his very knees as he climbed the Santa Scala in great Rome itself, had Luther sought peace of conscience and acceptance with the living God. Yet the very means adopted only increased his misery and his sense of guilt. Catholicism seemed to him but Judaism baptised. Although its elaborate and authoritative system was specially designed to provide and guarantee salvation, it proved itself, in its most characteristic official ministries, utterly incapable of giving personal

release from sin to this eagerly seeking and awakened soul.

But the peace of mind which the Church was unable to bestow, Luther found, where Paul in similar circumstances had found it, in the joyous embrace and full personal surrender of justifying faith. He experienced the immense personal relief of knowing he was acceptable to God, not as the result of prolonged ascetical self-discipline, or meritorious good works, or the intercessions of the saints, but simply in consequence of taking Jesus at His word, loving Him as Saviour, obeying Him as Lord, and so entering at once into the peace, joy, freedom, victory, and security of the Christian life. The hilarity of Luther was in part an outcome of this deliverance. After the elaborate court ceremonial of Catholic worship, it was a relief to think of Christ in more homely guise, and to associate Him—even through Christian mirth, music, and sunny laughter —with the familiar things of ordinary life.

II

This change of emphasis really involved a complete revolution in the conception of Christ Himself, His meaning for the soul, and the relation in which He stood to the Church, the Word, the Sacraments, and God.

In its Christological aspect the Reformation meant, not only that God was to be interpreted evangelically through Christ, but also that Christ was to be interpreted experimentally through His saving work, rather than metaphysically through the scholastic examination of His person, and the

equation of His being with the substance of the Godhead. "Christ is not called Christ because He has two natures. What is that to me? He bears this glorious and comforting name because of His office which He has undertaken." *

In its theological aspect the Reformation meant a new interpretation of both grace and faith. Catholicism regarded grace as a kind of rarefied supernatural gift, mysteriously blending with corporeal things, infused into the soul by sacramental means, and conferring upon it, not indeed the new righteousness which is by faith, but an added power to perform the old righteousness in a more perfect manner, and so become well-pleasing in the sight of God. Evangelicalism viewed grace as the personal action of God in Christ, freely going forth from will to will, and offering the guilty soul that which it most needs, the reconciling boon of immediate and unmerited forgiveness. As for faith, to the Catholic it signified assent, the hearty submission of mind and conscience to the entire system offered it by authority; to the Evangelical it meant trust, the soul's personal response to the saving message of the Gospel, its humble and glad confidence in the keeping and perfecting power of the love of God. "Faith taketh hold of Christ and hath Him present and holdeth Him enclosed as the ring doth the precious stone." †

The Evangelical conception of faith is deeply searching and exacting in its demands. Catholicism, by the importance it attaches to priest and sacrament,

* Luther, *Works* (Erlangen), xii., 244.
† Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, ii. 16.

removes a good deal of responsibility from the believer himself, and to that extent minimises the intensity of his spiritual conflict. But the Evangelical, who is denied the external guidance and control which an authoritative Church provides, is thrown back the more upon himself and Christ. The whole strife takes place within his own heart. There, in the city of Mansoul, rages the Holy War. Such a system, however, surely magnifies Christ, and gives Him just the opportunity He most desires, of intervening to deliver and heal and save. When the soul's fiery furnace is seven times heated, and priests and ecclesiastics are bidden to stand back, Jesus Himself draws near and appears in the midst as one like unto the Son of Man. By transferring the issues of life and death almost entirely from the corporate society to the single, wrestling, and often despairing soul, Evangelicalism favours inwardness and seriousness, sturdy independence and self-reliance.

No doubt sometimes, as in the case of John Bunyan, such solitary striving leads to needlessly prolonged self-questioning and inward torment, which a wise director of souls might have quickly eased. Yet on the other hand the system was one which produced strong men, who wrestled desperately with God in the night seasons, and who prevailed. In Cromwell's men-at-arms, who "put some conscience into what they did," in the Pilgrim Fathers, who sought an alien soil rather than be untrue to their conceptions of spiritual worship, we have some characteristic products of this aspect of Evangelical experience.

III

Having been fairly launched upon its way by Luther, the Evangelical conception of Christianity had in the course of history to define itself more clearly and unfold its implications more fully, both by what it affirmed and by what it denied. Unfortunately the negative rejections of the Reformation principle have bulked more largely in historical nomenclature than its positive affirmations. The terms "Protestant," "Nonconformist," "Dissenter," are all negative, defining the Evangelical spirit in terms of what it is not rather than of what it is. Yet in every case the negative designation is the secondary and derivative, not the primary and fundamental one. The Reformers and their spiritual successors were Evangelicals first, and Protestants, Nonconformists, Dissenters, only afterwards. They reacted negatively against Rome, sacerdotalism, or the national establishment of religion, only because they had already responded positively to Christ and His Gospel.

The stages of this development are full of interest. First came the repudiation of the claim of the Pope of Rome to be sole visible Head of the universal Church. A spiritual society, united in the bonds of evangelical faith and love to Christ alone, could not possibly acknowledge allegiance to an earthly potentate assuming the title of His vicar and representative. Such a position was no doubt reached gradually. In the early stages of the Reformation in England, the Pope was objected to chiefly on political grounds, and his place as Head of

the Church was naturally enough usurped by the King himself. But even this, though a necessary temporary phase of a long dispute, could not be taken as a permanent solution. The logic of the Evangelical principle in the end undermined the position of the first Reformers regarding the interdependence or essential oneness of the civil and spiritual authorities. For if the Church be an evangelical society, united by faith to Christ alone as Head, it cannot assent to the spiritual dominion of any secular or earthly power. One logical and historical outcome, then, of the Evangelical principle has been the movement towards civil and religious liberty, the doctrine of a free Church in a free State.

A great part of Europe, however, even when it had dispensed with the authority of the papacy, still retained the principle of episcopacy. The Pope might go, but it seemed essential to the Church that the bishop should remain. Here again there was something incompatible with the Evangelical principle, which contends that, in the dissemination of the Church's blessings and the diffusion of its life, Christ's gift of the Spirit accompanies the *Gospel*, and not apostolic orders or the administration of the sacraments. Episcopacy, of course, is not altogether debarred thereby, as a form of Church government. Only its claim to be vitally and essentially constitutive of the Church itself is emphatically repudiated, as an infringement of the prerogative of Christ and the freedom of His Spirit.

If, moreover, the bishop goes, as necessarily constitutive of the Church of Christ, the priest goes too.

Where Christ Himself fills the whole horizon to the believing soul, a mediating priest becomes more than superfluous, he is a positive and unwarrantable interference. The sacerdotal principle, that is to say, no less than the episcopal, is in the end incompatible with the Evangelical principle. The two cannot live together within the same house. An evangelical Church has no place within it for a sacrificing priesthood ; a sacerdotal Church cannot admit the priestless and evangelical ministries and doctrines of free grace. The representative official of a sacerdotal Church exists primarily to administer the sacraments ; of an evangelical, to preach the reconciling Word. And these two emphases point to differing conceptions of the person and work of Christ Himself. The Christ who deals directly and spontaneously in grace with every contrite and believing soul is not the same Christ as He who bestows that grace, at least normally, only through priestly and sacramental channels.

Further, the Evangelical principle leads logically, though slowly, to its own characteristic conception of the Church. Wherever that principle is wholeheartedly and exclusively accepted, the polity of the Church must in the end be determined by its creative faith, and by the inherent nature of the Gospel it proclaims. The Church, that is to say, becomes not a hierarchical institution organised on a diocesan basis, but a self-governing fellowship of Christ's covenanted people, a temple of God in the Spirit, the society of those who are united to Christ by faith, and who necessarily organise themselves around that spiritual experience. " The Gospel is

thrust into mankind as a magnet into a heap of iron dust and sand ; and the Church is composed of the particles that cling, organised by the movements of the magnetic force." *

Finally, we see an extreme development of the Evangelical principle in such organisations as the Society of Friends and the Salvation Army. Both communities, because of their rejection of sacraments, would meet with the disapproval, not only of Catholics generally, but also of the earlier Reformers themselves, who defined the Church as "the congregation of Saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered." † Yet they appear as the logical and legitimate outcome of a long development. Sacerdotal orders and sacraments, it is true, have disappeared. In the interests of subjectivity and the autonomy of faith, much has been discarded which most Christians regard as both valuable and seemly. Yet here are organisations that carry to its logical conclusion the affirmation of Luther that we are justified before God by faith alone. They reveal the Evangelical principle *in excelsis*. Without the aid of priest or bishop, initiatory rite or sacrament, they do indeed enter the secret place of the Most High, meet with the living and reigning Christ, and bring forth manifestly the fruits of His Spirit in their lives.

IV

In its attitude to the world, Evangelicalism inclined to be ascetic with an inward rather than an outward

* P. T. Forsyth, *Rome, Reform, and Reaction*, p. 133.
† Augsburg Confession, art. vii.

renunciation. Saintliness became, not withdrawal to the cloister, as in some forms of mediæval piety, but just self-denying fidelity to God in one's ordinary vocation. The sanctified man, being recreated in Christ Jesus, could not but sanctify everything he was concerned with. Like Oliver Goldsmith, in Johnson's eulogy, *Nullum tetigit quod non ornavit.* The suspicion cast on marriage as a state of life inferior to celibacy was thus removed. Holiness could nowhere be more fully manifested than in family relationships and business affairs. Indeed, the maid-of-all-work, scrubbing in the kitchen, might be nearer to God than the monk kneeling within his cell.

Moreover, being justified by faith and at peace with God, the Evangelical believer soon found himself at home in the realm of nature. The heavens, it was true, were the Lord's alone, but the earth He had given to the children of men, to be exploited and enjoyed. It followed from this that the treasures of science and art, with their alluring and ever expanding wonders, were readily laid open to the believing Christian. The vigorous industrial development of earth's material resources, which resulted throughout Europe in the rise of the middle classes and of the capitalistic system, is largely the offspring of the Reformation movement.

Once more, the Evangelical believer, though he looked upon this world as no more than a place of sojourn, was under an obligation to be actively engaged in reshaping human society, and labouring for the establishment of a Christian commonwealth. The impulse to reform prisons, to emancipate slaves,

to mitigate the hardships of life in factories, sprang naturally and inevitably from the Evangelical interpretation of Christianity.

Above all things the Evangelical spirit has been missionary and propagandist. Remembering the faithful saying that "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners," it has sought to fulfil the divine command, "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." In a sense, all sections of the Church may be described as evangelical. They wish to save men by announcing the good news of the love of God. Yet the missionary emphasis does not alter the character of the faith previously held : it only adds to it the note of urgency and propagandist zeal. The Christ whom Catholicism offers to the ignorant and unevangelised, at home or abroad, in the Sunday school or in the mission field, is still a Christ institutionally interpreted and sacerdotally mediated through rites and sacraments. Francis Xavier, carrying the Gospel of Christ to India, gave to the natives first of all the means of grace, the Creed, the Paternoster, the Ave Maria, and boasted that he had baptised "great multitudes of infants that knew not their right hand from their left." In Evangelical propaganda the message of the Gospel is reduced to its simplest and most essential terms. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." Priesthoods, rites, sacraments are dispensed with or subordinated. Instead of explanations of the Mass there is put in the forefront the teaching of the Bible. The one thing needful for all men everywhere is personal, saving trust in the living and loving Redeemer of their souls.

That this suffices to win and to transform men of every kindred and tribe and tongue is evidenced by the experience of missionaries everywhere. "The story of Christ is the greatest asset we have," writes one from Africa. "The centre and core of the Gospel," we learn from China, "the one unique and surprising element, the Cross, possesses the greatest and overmastering power of appeal." "The idea of an inferior suffering or dying for his superior is innate in the mind of Japanese loyalty, but the idea of a superior suffering or dying for an inferior is something out of their thoughts; but, when once entertained, the force and beauty of it appeal to the Japanese mind." "The moral law of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount appeals most to the ordinary Hindu mind; but to the Vedantist, and to all inclined to mysticism, St. John's Gospel appeals far more than any other part of Scripture; indeed, they say they understand it better than we do." *

V

John Bunyan, whose *Grace Abounding* may be taken as a classical expression of Evangelicalism, was long prevented from fully apprehending and rejoicing in Jesus Christ, because he was caught in the toils of Reformation theology and believed in the literal inspiration of every text of Scripture. Jesus, he learned from Mark's Gospel, "called unto Him whom He would." How dreadful if, among those whom He willed thus to call unto Himself, John

* *World's Missionary Conference Reports* (1910), vol. iv., pp. 106, 189, 286, 301.

Bunyan of Bedford should not be included! The more he thought about it, the more he felt convinced that such a rejection would be fully justified. Many and grievous were the sins that might be laid to his charge. He was guilty of blasphemy and profane speech, and had been a ring-leader in "all manner of vice and ungodliness." He had even played tip-cat openly on the village green on Sundays. Yes, and after conversion he had gone about to establish his own righteousness—a much more serious thing—and had walked jauntily to Church with head in air, feeling that he "pleased God as well as any man in England."

What must be the fate of such a reprobate? Good works could not save him, for they were as filthy rags. Repentance? That availed not for Esau, though he sought it diligently with tears; how then could it avail for Bunyan? Would faith suffice to justify the soul? It might, but then Bunyan discovered to his infinite grief that he had no faith, or at least not enough of it. He had said to the puddles by the roadside "Be dry," and they had remained stubbornly unchanged. What, then, of simple love to Christ? Alas, the dreadful truth must be confessed that the devil at his elbow had prompted him to sell Christ, and the awful words had actually been uttered, "Let Him go if He will." Surely, in return for these accumulated slights, the Christ of Glory must be looking at John Bunyan of Bedford through the tiles of the roof with holy sorrow and scornful reprobation. The Scripture could not be broken, and every second text seemed loudly to condemn him. He appeared clearly to be

worse than Peter who had denied his Master, worse even than the apostate Judas who betrayed Him.

Relief came at last to the sorely tried spirit of the Elstow tinker. It was some consolation to remember that even in his worst degree of turpitude he had never definitely *refused* to be justified by the blood of Christ. Perhaps, therefore, some city of refuge would open its gates and provide a sanctuary for him after all. Then with unspeakable joy he came to realise that, in spite of everything, Jesus Christ still loved him and had died to save him. With clear visual imagination Bunyan seemed actually to see the Lord of Glory leaping from the grave in the fullness of resurrection life on Easter morning. The evidence of his salvation was there, hanging from heaven in his sight, with many golden seals thereon. He was to be a chosen vessel of mercy after all, his accusing conscience sprinkled with the blood of Christ.

Oh, how welcome and liberating were the truths of Scripture which now spangled before his eyes. The enemy of souls might say what he liked against him, and all of it would be true. But what matter ? *Christ* had become unto him wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, and all was well. " Here, therefore, I lived for some time, very sweetly at peace with God through Christ. Oh, methought, Christ ! Christ ! there was nothing but Christ that was before mine eyes. . . . Now could I look from myself to Him, and should reckon all those graces of God, that now were green in me, were yet but like those cracked groats and fourpence halfpennies that rich men carry in their purses, when their gold is in

their trunks at home! Oh, I saw my gold was in my trunk at home! In Christ, my Lord and Saviour."

The joy of this deliverance was unspeakable. After a reading of the twelfth chapter of Hebrews, he says, "Christ was precious to my soul that night. I could scarce lie in bed for joy and peace and triumph through Christ. . . . Of all tears, they are the best that are made by the blood of Christ; and of all joys, that is the sweetest that is mixed with mourning over Christ. Oh, it is a goodly thing to be on our knees, with Christ in our arms, before God. I hope I know something of these things."

VI

The Evangelical conception of Christianity, like every other, has its own peculiar limitations. In the first place, the encouragement given by Protestantism to subjective faith, uncontrolled by the moral discipline of an authoritative Church, is apt to produce an unregulated army of religious cranks, fanatics, faddists, sectarians, and extremists. When every man has his own interpretation of Christianity, and there is no unifying principle of love or authority to bring these into harmony, the one Christ is woefully divided. Over-individualism becomes eccentricity and caprice.

Again, Evangelical Christianity is apt to sacrifice too much in discarding those aids to piety which Catholic sacramentalism so abundantly provides. A purely subjective or spiritual religion, which rejects all outward imaginative expression, is violently unnatural and indeed impossible. The alternative

is, either a beautiful (though not necessarily an ornate and burdensome) expression of the invisible through the visible, or one that is ugly and depressing. Evangelical Christianity has unfortunately too often chosen the latter.

Evangelicalism, further, has often become discredited through its association with antiquated theological ideas, zeal without knowledge, hysterical sensationalism, exploded beliefs in the inerrancy of Scripture. This is to be regretted. There is no reason whatever why the spirit of evangelism should not appropriate to its use the most modern equipment in every direction. Indeed, it is its duty to do so. Evangelical enthusiasm should not be left to the illiterate or spend itself only on the slums. All talents should be consecrated, all methods employed, in order that all classes, but especially the worldly, the sinful, and the despairing, should be brought into personal fellowship with the Giver of life and love and peace and power.

The chief difficulty of the Evangelical type of faith, however, lies in its spiritual idealism and the exacting nature of its demands. It asks the ordinary man to think independently, to take sin seriously, to deal with Christ directly in the personal embrace of faith, to exercise the responsibility of Christian liberty in all things, and generally to show the characteristics of a spiritual aristocracy. Few are sufficient for these things. The majority of men, acting under the influence of herd instinct and mass suggestion, will always prefer a priestly and conventional religion. They would rather have their duties and beliefs prescribed for them by authority,

and transfer to other shoulders the responsibility for their salvation, than go through any vitally emancipating experiences themselves. There is nothing most men desire less than spiritual freedom. Other difficulties which confront Evangelicalism to-day are the widespread modern ignorance of the Bible, the prevailing absence of any sense of sin, largely owing to immanental and evolutionary theories of the universe, the consequently feeble sense of the fear of God, the present marked emphasis on the social rather than on the personal aspects of Christianity, the vogue of semi-religious cults like Christian Science, the preference for reverential awe or vague spirituality in religion over definite personal *faith* in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Yet the Church must be evangelical or perish, and never was a revival of evangelical religion more needed than it is to-day. Only a spiritual quickening on a large scale will enable us to face, and to accomplish, the tasks of reconstruction which await us. What is needed is an application of the old Christian motive to the new world-situation, a letting go of much that is merely traditional in our conceptions of Christ, and a passionate re-valuing of what remains. We cannot of course foresee in what way the Holy Spirit will next possess us, but we may be sure that He will once again take of the things of Christ and, in glorifying Him, show us more of the unsearchable riches of His grace. As Professor H. G. Wood has expressed it,* the next revival "will spring from a renewed understanding of the heart of Christianity, a renewed loyalty to the central figure

* *Living Issues in Religious Thought*, p. 139.

in Christianity, which will make clear the non-essential character of much that men assert to be essential still. . . . It will so exalt Christ before the nations that they will see in Him the wisdom of God and forsake the wisdom of this world."

CHAPTER VI

THE CHRIST OF RATIONALISM

The spirit of Rationalism takes many forms. Under various names it appears both within and without the Church of Christ, in ancient as well as in modern times. Indeed, its first Christian representative was the apostle Thomas himself, who said he would not believe in the resurrection of Christ unless he had convincing evidence of it through the sense of touch. Rationalism is a temper and attitude of mind, rather than a definite body of belief. It is not necessarily negative or heterodox in its conclusions. All that it demands is that reason should exercise unfettered sovereignty over the whole realm of our mental and moral judgments.

In relation to the person of Christ, Rationalism was bound sooner or later to challenge some of the claims put forward by authority. When it was stated that Jesus of Nazareth was the Second Person of the Trinity, who came down from heaven to redeem man, was miraculously born of a pure virgin, walked upon the sea, turned water into wine, fed five thousand people with a few loaves, restored the dead to life, Himself rose bodily from a grave in Syria, and was seen to vanish in the clouds of heaven, the inquiring mind naturally asked what was the evidence for these things, and whether some

more rational explanation of the alleged occurrences might not be offered.

Rationalist interpretations of the Man of Nazareth arise in many cases from a sincere desire to get nearer to Him than the dogmas of the Church appear to allow, and they have contributed elements of great value to our understanding of the historic Christ. Jesus Himself never sought to suppress reason in the interests of some supposed peremptory claim to absolute and infallible authority. On the contrary, He respected men's reason and constantly appealed to it. "What think ye?" He used to say. "Know ye not of yourselves what is good?" Many a time He withheld a plain answer to a plain question, in order to encourage His questioner to reflect. The questioning temper, therefore, which agrees with Plato that "nothing is to be believed which is unworthy of God," is one which the Church should cordially welcome. "The best evidence that the message of the Church is really the word of God, lies in its being able to liberate and satisfy the reason, which is God's original gift to man." *

I

Passing over the essentially rationalistic interpretations of Jesus associated with Arius in the fourth century and Socinus in the sixteenth, we may begin our survey by referring to the rise of Deism in the eighteenth century. If Evangelicalism was a direct product of the Reformation spirit, Deism had affinities rather with the spirit of the Renaissance.

* C. Gore, *The Holy Spirit and the Church*, p. 182.

The Rationalism of this period, desiring to emancipate itself from ecclesiastical authority on the one hand, and to ally itself with the new scientific spirit on the other, sought for some working philosophy that should reconcile the old dualism of the human and the divine, the natural and the supernatural. Its appeal was accordingly addressed neither to the Church nor to the Bible, but simply to intrinsic truth, as it is revealed by that candle of the Lord which illumines the inward parts of the mind of man. Where there are not two worlds, but only one, the proper instrument of knowledge is not faith but reason.

In this movement we have the beginnings of the modern spirit. Facts which the mediæval mind instinctively interpreted from above downwards now began to be interpreted from beneath upwards. Nothing in religion was any longer to be taken as presupposed, and by a natural reaction against everything miraculous or supernatural, Christianity became reduced to a system that might readily commend itself to the dictates of conscience, the findings of intelligence, the voice of common sense. It was as old as creation, the religion of all good men in every age. Christ in such a scheme of thought could be no other than a supreme teacher or religious genius, a spiritual inspiration and example to men, the most perfect revealer, hitherto, of a moral law which of course exists quite independently of His own relation to it. He belonged therefore to the same category as Plato and Cicero, Buddha and Zoroaster, though He doubtless far excelled them in wisdom and insight. Voltaire, indeed, called

Jesus "the Socrates of Galilee." Leibnitz said, in the preface to his *Théodicée*, that "what Jesus did was to translate natural religion into a law and to give it the authority of a public dogma." Kant held the view that what saves us is not in any sense the person of Jesus, but rather faith in that ideal of ethical perfection of which He has become the symbol. Shelley, in his *Essay on Christianity*, took the same position: "Jesus Christ has said no more than the most excellent philosophers have felt and expressed. . . . The doctrines of Jesus Christ have been the doctrines of every just and compassionate mind that ever speculated on the social nature of man."

Rationalism of this kind is valuable as a protest against arid dogmatism and intolerant ecclesiasticism. In it we see the spirit of man taking revenge upon the Church for its almost complete ignoring of the earthly life of Jesus, in the interests of supernaturalism, during well-nigh fifteen centuries. Yet such an interpretation of Jesus does less than justice to the uniqueness of His personality and His consciousness of the Father, and it is based upon the unproved assumption that God is not free to take fresh action, supernaturally, in redeeming a world which sin has ruined.

Probably Jesus Himself would be satisfied, in the first instance at least, with hearty belief in the divinity of His message, even if men could not immediately advance to belief in the divinity of the Messenger. But Christian faith and love have never been able to stop at that point. The Church cannot consent to a view of Christ's person which

leaves Him no permanent place in the religion which bears His name, and deprives Him of the right to claim our worshipful and saving trust.* Eighteenth century Rationalism invited men to share the faith of Jesus, but took from them the option of having faith in Christ, not realising that the religion of Jesus and the Christian Gospel are two wholly different things. It offered the truths Christ taught, rather than the truth He was. But the Christian heart finds something defective in a gospel which would have been very much the same if Jesus Christ had never lived at all.

II

Another rationalist approach to Christ is that which makes much of His mental and other limitations. He has given us no guidance, we are told, in the realms of art or science or politics or philosophy. If we seek light on such important matters as secular administration and civil government, the distribution of wealth, the organisation of labour, the true nature of education, the use and abuse of political power, we are likely to get more help from the wise men of Greece and China than from Christ. Further, it is contended that Jesus frequently proved to be mistaken in matters on which He did pronounce a judgment. In His conception of the influence of daimons upon diseases, in what He said about the authorship of certain Psalms, in His anticipation of an early return as Messiah in the clouds of heaven,

* "For me, to worship Jesus as God is worshipped, to trust Him as God is trusted, to owe to Him what we can owe to God alone, is the essence of Christianity."—J. DENNEY, *Letters to W. R. Nicoll*, p. 121.

Jesus was plainly wrong. How could such a person claim to be divine? Must we not conclude, with Dr. Schweitzer, that "Jesus does not stay; He passes by our time and returns to His own. . . . It is not Jesus as historically known, but Jesus as spiritually arisen within men, who is significant for our time and can help it?" *

When these charges are seriously made, the fact is overlooked that a perfect revelation, within the life of Christ, of the nature and character of God as holy love, may be quite compatible with the strictest limitations of His earthly ministry and mental outlook. Indeed, it may be said that the fundamental conditions of any divine incarnation, as well as the special circumstances of Christ's Messianic calling, *required* that Jesus should share the ideas of His contemporaries on all that was not vital to His spiritual and religious mission. Christ's clear and unclouded vision of the Father enabled Him to enunciate spiritual truths of eternal value and universal application, but it imparted to Him no kind of infallible or supernatural knowledge regarding political, scientific, literary, or philosophical matters lying beyond the sphere of His divine vocation. And surely, if the love of God could be fully manifested through a poor man, a weak man, a toiling, suffering, and tempted man, it could also be revealed through a man who openly admitted that He was ignorant of many things.

Apart from the objections taken to Christ on the ground of His alleged mental limitations, it is sometimes stated that His claims to be divine are

* A. Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, pp. 397, 399.

invalidated by serious ethical defects. He who definitely objected to being called good, treated His own mother with unbecoming harshness, and showed but scant respect for family life, cursed a fig tree for being barren, inflicted wanton injury upon an innocent herd of swine and their owners, subjected money-changers to violent personal insult, and addressed His enemies in the language of virulent abuse, cannot surely be held up as an ideal for the admiration and imitation of subsequent generations.

Many of the offences here alluded to are less serious than they appear, and are removed by a careful and honest exegesis of the passages of Scripture concerned. The few that remain are so questionable and so isolated that they do not seriously alter the general impression we have of the character of Jesus, except perhaps to give it a more masculine strength and force than it would otherwise possess. Exceptional conduct was no doubt laid upon Jesus by fidelity to His Messianic task ; yet, though His ethical standard was infinitely higher than that of His contemporaries, He shows that He was not Himself aware of coming short of it. The deep, pellucid waters of His fellowship with God were troubled indeed by sorrow, but they seem never to have been ruffled by any consciousness of sin.

By far the most serious ethical accusations ever brought against Jesus are those which were advanced in criticism of Him by Nietzsche. According to this thinker, Christ did the greatest possible disservice to humanity by befriending the weak, the sickly, the outcast, the degenerate. The effect of His coming into the world has been a disastrous

reversal of nature's own scale of social and moral values, an undue stimulation of the tender instincts in humanity, a fatal substitution of enervating pity for bracing hardness in the relations of man with man, and the consequent foolish preservation of neurotics, ne'er-do-wells, and decadents, who should have been allowed to perish. Jesus has thus fostered invalidism, encouraged moral failure, and enormously increased the sum of human misery. His Gospel is a gospel for slaves and cowards and grovelling and morbid weaklings. He has made His Church a hospital for the feeble, the sentimental, and the introspective, instead of a gymnasium for the strong and healthy. He has promised His beggarly and mercenary followers the miserable rewards of compensation in another world instead of giving them power and mastery in this. His message, therefore, is for the dregs and offscourings of society, not for its virile, aristocratic, and progressive elements, for the dragging rear, not for the forward-pushing van. Were the world as a whole to accept His immoral, non-resisting, self-effacing, and world-renouncing teaching, it would without doubt perish everlastingly. Its only hope is to turn aside, while there is yet time, to the more masculine and robust ethic of egoism, self-assertion, eugenics, and the Will to Power.

This fierce invective might carry more weight were it not so violent in temper and so one-sided. It is true that Christ has a message of hope and comfort for the enfeebled, but He has also a message of inspiration for the strong. He tells men plainly, for example, that the way of life is strait and narrow, and

that even the elect will have to agonise if they are to find it. He also affirms that when the salt that should preserve society from corruption loses its savour, it is good for nothing but to be ignominiously rejected. In the light of these and other passages a modern writer claims that Jesus, no less than Plato, is to be regarded as a forerunner and pioneer of the modern science of eugenics.*

Nietzsche's attack, moreover, proceeds from a total misunderstanding of the real significance of Christianity. The humility which Christ both exemplified and demanded was never put forward as an end in itself. It was but the means to the exercising of a spiritual power far transcending that of any superman who remains only within the worldly sphere of things. If Jesus emphatically rejected an earthly Will to Power, it was because He was able so perfectly to exert a heavenly. "Christianity has never preached hostility to or contempt for strength, grandeur, or beauty *as such*. All Christian souls, beginning with the first of them, rejoiced at having had revealed to them the infinite source of all that is truly strong and beautiful, and at being saved by it from subjection to the false power and grandeur of the powerless and unlovely elements of the world." †

At the same time, Nietzsche's indictment may suggest to us that we ought to form a more virile and masculine conception of the character of Christ than we usually do. Too long have we allowed mildly devotional pictures and the haloed figures of

* Havelock Ellis, *The Dance of Life*, pp. 331–332.
† Vladimir Solovyof, *The Justification of the Good*, p. xxi.

stained-glass windows to present to us an effeminate and weak Jesus. No such character could ever have created the Church or moulded history as Christ has done. If He gathered to Himself all that was best in the manly paganism of the later Roman Empire, why should He not also attract and spiritualise the neo-paganism of the modern Teutonic world, its pride of race, its courage, its gentlemanliness, its honour? This does not mean, however, that the Christ of the Gospels can have any sympathy with the unscrupulous cruelty, the worship of mere power, the egoistic arrogance which Nietzsche really stands for. The God of Christianity, it will be found, is not weak. In the words of one of the meekest of His worshippers, He "sheweth strength with His arm"; but when He does so it is to put down the mighty from their seats and to "scatter the proud in the imagination of their hearts." To the Nietzschean superman, as to the natural man everywhere, the Cross of Christ will always remain a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence. It can never be recognised for what it really is, the *power* of God as well as the wisdom of God. We have yet to see whether, even from the standpoint of survival value, the world's egoistic, self-asserting, aggressive ethic, as exemplified by Nietzsche, or Christ's moral law of self-renouncing, sacrificial love, as exemplified by Tolstoy, is destined to be the more effective, in the long run, in promoting the health and well-being of mankind.

III

Once more, the place claimed for Jesus by Christian faith may be disputed in some quarters from the

standpoint of modern biological science. We are familiar to-day with the conception of evolution, and it is difficult to reconcile the progressive and gradual advancement of humanity towards perfection with a divine incarnation at one particular stage of man's development. If any supreme disclosure of God's nature is to be expected, we are told, it will come at the end of the process, or in the process as a whole, and not in any climax appearing in the middle of it. According to Edward Carpenter, Christ has unique value for a certain stage only of humanity's development, as it passes from its first naive phase of simple consciousness or innocence into its present phase of self-consciousness, with its accompanying sense of sin and disharmony with the whole. He will, however, be superseded when humanity reaches the stage of universal consciousness.*

The issue which this challenge raises is a very serious one. It calls in question the finality of Christianity as an absolute religion. Was the presence of God in Christ unique, or was it something which may be surpassed in the progress of the race? Have there been, may there be, more incarnations of God than one? Is Jesus the product of evolution, or its Lord? Has a revelation been given to us in history, or is all history itself the revelation? Is God only immanent within the stream of progress, or is He transcendent over it as well? Much depends on the answer we give to these questions. If Jesus is but to take His place in a never-ending series of revelations of the Father,

* E. Carpenter, *Pagan and Christian Creeds*, chap. xvi., "The Exodus of Christianity."

then His work is done, He is but a herald of the dawn. The permanence of Jesus, no less than His pre-eminence, is endangered. His revelation is but tentative and provisional till a greater than He shall come. The Judge and Saviour of the race has become its product. Jesus can no longer be described as "He who was, and is, and is to come." The throne He formerly occupied is left vacant. He is not any more the Word, but only a letter in the same, as it is spelled out endlessly from generation to generation.

The normal Christian consciousness will never give its assent to these conclusions. As the one and only Mediator between God and man, Christ has had no predecessor and can have no successor. He is not the end of an old series so much as the beginning of a new, conditioned but not created by the historical circumstances in which He first appeared. In nineteen centuries there is no sign of His being superseded, and further progress in the things to which He gave His life seems inconceivable to us.

As for the alleged inevitable advance of humanity towards ever higher goals, we have little warrant for believing this, and the idea itself involves serious philosophical difficulties. There has been retrogression in human affairs, no less than progress; and the conception of a better world-order which is to succeed this one is largely a survival of apocalyptism. The idea of progress itself, if it is to be called progress, must be subsumed under some higher category, outside the time series, by which it may be judged. Christ, that is to say, cannot be interpreted in terms of immanence alone ; an element of transcendence

also is required. Only the eternal can weigh the successive values of the temporal and prevent them from ultimately and wholly perishing. Some conception of pure being is indispensable for the interpretation of all becoming. As in the case of a poem, or other work of art, it is our apprehension of the whole that gives its proper significance to each several part. There is no metaphysical objection, therefore, to an appearance of the absolute within the sphere of time. The paradox must be maintained that Christ is both a figure in history and a figure above history. "Of Him and through Him and unto Him are all things." The variegated relativity of the ever-changing phases through which historical Christianity must pass serves but to unfold its absolute validity in the person of its Founder. "Christ in His mystical body reconciles all things in Himself—not only, as St. Paul teaches us, all classes, all races, and both sexes ; but all things in heaven and earth—matter and spirit, nature and supernature, individual personality and society, self-realisation and self-sacrifice, liberty and authority, the universal and the particular, multiplicity and unity, change and rest, progress and present value, becoming and being, history and eternity." *

IV

It is not from the standpoint of biological science, however, or Nietzschean neo-paganism, that the claims of Jesus to be divine are most seriously threatened to-day. The subtlest and most damaging mode of disparagement is that which seeks to resolve

* E. J. Watkin, in *God and the Supernatural*, p. 276.

Him into a product of folk-psychology. "Most of the elements of Christianity," says Mr. Bertrand Russell, "are derived from the worship of the spirit of vegetation." * The contention is that the Græco-Roman world into which Jesus came was a veritable welter of mystery religions and nature cults introduced from Egypt and the east. These were ultimately derived from man's primitive instincts, and his absorbed preoccupation in the processes of nature, such as the seasons of the year, the birth and death of vegetation, the winter solstice and the vernal equinox, the mystery of sex and its taboos, the relationship of the tribe to its sacred totems. The result was that men were already perfectly familiar with the ideas of a divine trinity, a virgin birth, a dying and rising saviour-god, and the transference of the world's evils to a sinless being slain as a kind of scapegoat. These notions drifted about the Roman Empire, waiting for some figure in whom they could find concrete embodiment and a means of propagation. At the coming of Christ they gathered round Him as clouds gather round a mountain peak. All the contemporary myth-making tendencies of the human mind, the syncretising imaginative forces that had created Tammuz and Adonis, Mithra and Osiris, Attis and Dionysus, fastened upon Jesus. He straightway fitted, or was made to fit, the religious ideals and aspirations of the period.

In this mass of beliefs, we are told, it is vain to search for the historical Christ. He is lost beyond recovery beneath the sands of time. As well try

* *The Prospects of Industrial Civilisation*, p. 47.

to distinguish, in a composite photograph, the first of many successive and always obliterating impressions, or to grasp that elusive phantom, which we necessarily invest with the qualities of our own mind, the *Ding an sich* of Kant's metaphysical realism. Paul himself took little trouble to become acquainted with " Christ after the flesh." The real object of his interest was the Heavenly Man, the Lord of Glory. All our New Testament biographies of Him were written long after the events recorded, in order to satisfy the faith, or the curiosity, of those who already implicitly believed in Him. Some modern writers, accordingly, such as W. B. Smith and Arthur Drews, take leave to doubt whether the person we call Jesus ever existed historically at all.

It is even claimed that His historical existence is by no means necessary to faith. We are well enough off with an idealised product of the human mind. The world has been profoundly influenced in various ways by Orpheus and Prometheus, by Hamlet and William Tell, though it is certain that no such persons ever existed in the flesh. The same may be said even of Santa Claus ! In the case of Alexander the Great and the Emperor Charlemagne, of King Arthur and Francis of Assisi, how much is truth and how much is legend ? Would they be less influential in history if they were found to be legendary figures altogether ? Let us give free scope, then, to man's poetising, myth-making faculty, his power of projecting silhouettes from his own mind upon the airy clouds of fantasy and imagination. These sublimations elucidate experience and give a needed divine sanction to

our desires. They are crudely externalised at first as dreams, but only in order that afterwards they may be reabsorbed into our inward experience as realities. We may therefore quite lawfully *ascribe* divinity to Christ, the Hero-Man, as a necessary means to becoming divine ourselves. And surely such a Christ, the creature of popular imagination, enhaloed and glorified by our innermost aspirations, would rest upon a securer throne than the first century Jew who is all that is left to us from the most radical criticism of the New Testament. "The sacrifice of the historicity of the man Jesus will be more than compensated by the new spiritual interpretation of all the deeds, words, and traits ascribed to Him as symbols of the great auto-soteriological processes of the folk-soul ; Christianity represents the greatest cultural synthesis which Mansoul has yet made." *

On this position several comments may be made. Let it be granted that early Christianity largely adapted itself to the customs of prevailing heathenism, "that the festival of St. George in April has replaced the ancient pagan festival of the Parilia ; that the festival of St. John the Baptist in June has succeeded to a heathen midsummer festival of water ; that the festival of the Assumption of the Virgin in August has ousted the festival of Diana; that the feast of All Souls in November is a continua-

* G. Stanley Hall, *Jesus the Christ in the Light of Psychology*, vol. i., p. 203. Compare H. G. Wells : "Whether Jesus actually existed as a finite individual person in the opening of the Christian era seems to me a question entirely beside the mark. The evidence at this distance is imperceptible for and against. The Christ we know is quite evidently something different from any finite person, a figure, a conception, a synthesis of emotions, experiences, and aspirations, sustained by and sustaining millions of human souls" (*First and Last Things*, p. 84).

tion of an old heathen feast of the dead." * It is surely a recommendation of Christianity, rather than a charge against it, that its roots go down to the older animistic faiths, and that it both sublimates and satisfies the deepest aspirations of humanity. Christ fulfils all dim religious gropings after the light, just as He fulfilled the Mosaic law. Savages no less than Jews may well have inquired and searched diligently, wondering what the Spirit which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand of a glory that should follow.

Further, it may be frankly admitted that the Christian Church, as in the Roman Catholic Easter processions of southern Italy, has sometimes assimilated overmuch of the superstitious practices of heathen cults, and that "paganism has had its revenges in the very heart of Christianity." † Yet the fact remains that the Church of Christ had passed through its early formative period before it came into contact with the mystery religions, and that when it did meet them it promptly repudiated them. Moreover, Tammuz and Dionysus do not pretend to be historical figures. They are acknowledged to be symbols or embodiments of ideas only. But Christ's historicity is too plain in the New Testament to be for a moment doubted. What they aspired to be, He was—that, and infinitely more. In ethical quality and redeeming power He far transcended the cults which He superseded.

As for the plea that faith's security and hope, as products of our own creative imagination, are quite

* Sir James G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (abridged edition), p. 360.
† G. Berguer, *Some Aspects of the Life of Jesus*, p. 64.

independent of any need of authorisation from the facts of history, that cannot be admitted. The Church at least could not continue to regard as ontologically true what it knew to be historically false, or to worship as divine that which it discovered to be not even human, but a cypher merely. Any moral and spiritual authority offered to men, which proved on examination to be no more than a sublimation of the herd instinct, or a poetic symbol of idealised self-interest, could not, when found out, be treated any longer with the respect and honour which it claimed. One solid fact of historical divine revelation is of more value to us than the most beautiful and noble dreams of the devout imagination ; and it is just such a fact that we have in Jesus Christ.

V

If Newman may be taken as an exponent of Catholicism, and Bunyan of Evangelicalism, we may turn to John Stuart Mill's well-known tribute to Jesus Christ as a beautiful example of that reverential attitude towards Him which is quite consistent with the profession of rationalist principles. Gladstone once called Mill " the saint of Rationalism," and in the following noble words we may see how Mill's emotional nature demanded compensation in later life for the starving it received in the severely intellectual training of his earlier years.

" About the life and sayings of Jesus there is a stamp of personal originality combined with profundity of insight, which, if we abandon the idle expectation of finding scientific precision when

something very different was aimed at, must place the Prophet of Nazareth, even in the estimation of those who have no belief in his inspiration, in the very first rank of the men of sublime genius of whom our species can boast. When this pre-eminent genius is combined with the qualities of probably the greatest moral reformer, and martyr to that mission, who ever existed on earth, religion cannot be said to have made a bad choice in pitching on this man as the ideal representative and guide of humanity; nor, even now, would it be easy, even for an unbeliever, to find a better translation of the rule of virtue from the abstract to the concrete, than to endeavour so to live that Christ would approve our life.* When to this we add that, to the conception of the rational sceptic, it remains a possibility that Christ actually was what He supposed Himself to be—not God, for He never made the smallest pretensions to that character, and would probably have thought such a pretension as blasphemous as it seemed to the men who condemned Him—but a man charged with a special, express, and unique commission from God to lead mankind to truth and virtue ; we may well conclude that the influences of religion on the character which will remain after rational criticism has done its utmost against the evidences of religion, are well worth preserving, and that what they lack in direct

* Compare Dostoevsky : " I believe there is nothing lovelier, deeper, more sympathetic, more rational, more human, and more perfect than the Saviour. I say to myself that not only is there no one else like Him, but that there could be no one. I would even say more : if any one could prove to me that Christ is outside the truth, and if the truth really did exclude Christ, I should prefer to stay with Christ and not with truth " (*Letters of F. M. Dostoevsky*, ed. E. C. Mayne, p. 71).

strength as compared with those of a firmer belief, is more than compensated by the greater truth and rectitude of the morality they sanction." *

VI

It has sometimes been supposed that a purely rationalist estimate of Christ, could we reach it, would do more to commend Him to men's minds than the generally accepted view which puts Him too far from us by exalting Him to the sphere of the divine. Such is the opinion, for example, of Mr. H. G. Wells. "The Christians' Christ," he writes, "is too fine for me, not incarnate enough, not flesh enough, not earth enough. . . . I could love him, I think, more easily if the dead had not risen, and if he had lain in peace in his sepulchre, instead of coming back more enhaloed and whiter than ever, as a postscript to his own tragedy. . . . He had no petty weaknesses. Now the essential trouble of my life is its petty weaknesses. If I am to have that love, that sense of understanding fellowship, which is, I conceive, the peculiar magic and merit of the idea of a personal Saviour, then I need some one quite other than this terrible and incomprehensible Galilean, with his crown of thorns, his blood-stained hands and feet." † Mr. Wells even goes on to

* J. S. Mill, *Three Essays on Religion*, pp. 254–255. Compare Emerson's tribute to Jesus in his *Divinity College Address*.

† *First and Last Things*, pp. 86–87. Compare Ibsen: "Oh, he is terrible, that mysterious, that merciless god-man! At every turn, wherever I wished to go, he met me, stark and stern, with his unconditional, inexorable demands. . . . All that is human has become unlawful since the day when the seer of Galilee became ruler of the world. With Him, to live means to die" (Julian the Apostate, in *Cæsar's Apostasy*, act v.).

suggest that more help is to be derived from a man like Oliver Goldsmith !

The history of the Church and of mankind, however, hardly bears out these conclusions. Sinful fellow-mortals may make lenient critics and excellent boon companions, but it is not to them that we turn for redemption and renewal in the hour of our direst need. Then we require some one who will do more than simply point out to us the way of life and urge us earnestly to follow it. A Christ who was no more than one of ourselves could never have created the Christian Church, nor could He continue to receive adoring worship and utter self-committal from the souls of men. No such person, it may be added, emerges from the strictest and most impartial study of the Gospel records. There is more in Jesus Christ than Rationalism can account for. He is man, but, as even Napoleon saw, He is more than man ; and it is just because He brings to us, in His humanity, a perfect fellow-feeling for our needs and the actual realisation of that to which we should aspire, and also brings to us, through His divinity, the grace and renewal needed by us when we fail, that He holds His unchallenged place in the throne of the Father's glory, the praises of the saints, and the affections of mankind.

CHAPTER VII

THE CHRIST OF SPECULATION

SOMETHING valuable is sacrificed when we pass from the realm of religion to that of metaphysics. To express our consciousness of the whole, our response to the universe, no longer in devout, intuitive, emotional, and imaginative language, but now in conceptual, speculative, and analytical language, is to find ourselves immediately in a colder climate. We hold at arms' length what we formerly embraced ; we judge what we have just loved. Vital contact is gone ; logic and ratiocination take its place.

Christianity, we know, came to the world as a religion and not as a philosophy. It offered to men a redemption rather than a cosmogony, a way of life rather than an explanation of the universe. This distinction still most healthily marks it off, to a large degree, from the great religions of the East. Yet even a way of life *involves* a philosophy, and the experiences of faith demand a metaphysic that will explain them. "If all ontology is illusion," writes Baron von Hügel, "then all religion is so likewise." * We are compelled, therefore, to seek an understanding of ultimate reality which shall do justice to the facts of history and the truths of personal experience, and nowhere is this more necessary than in connec-

* *Eternal Life*, p. 188.

tion with Him who properly belongs to both spheres. Jesus Himself raised the question of the final significance of His person by the challenging inquiry, "Who do men say that I am?" He did not, indeed, press this question very far, on its speculative side, but He left abundant material for the most eager discussions and investigations in the generations following. Christ's own consciousness of God the Father, and men's consciousness of God in Him, could not be left unexplored. They must be diligently searched and examined in the light of philosophic thought, and pursued to their farthest metaphysical implications.

I

So long as Christianity remained on Jewish soil, its speculative significance remained undeveloped; when it passed over into the Greek world, however, a number of vital questions immediately pressed for a solution. If Christ was both human and divine, what was His exact relation to God and to humanity? Was He a divine being who had become human, or a human being who had become divine? Were there in Him two wills and only one person, or two persons and only one will? Was He a created being, doubtless the highest, or was He pre-existent from eternity? If the former, could He continue to be worshipped? If the latter, when, in what manner, and to what degree, did He empty Himself of the divine attributes of omnipotence and omniscience in assuming the limitations of a mortal life? Was the death of Jesus no more than a glorious martyrdom

in the cause of truth, or did it have expiatory value in removing sin, thus fundamentally altering the relations existing between men and God? These questions, already beginning to be asked within the New Testament itself, could not be laid aside till a satisfactory answer to them had been found, and the decisions of Chalcedon in the fifth century expressed the final conclusions of the Greek mind upon the Hebrew data presented to it by the Gospel in the first century.

As we have already seen, the Hellenistic thinkers who formulated the historic creeds of the Church thought of God on a basis of philosophic dualism. As the ground of all existence, the Absolute, He was an infinite, changeless, and eternal Being, separated by the widest gulf from even the highest of His creatures, sole, remote, self-subsisting, in His essential nature incomprehensible, to be reached only by the negation of every positive or finite attribute. How, then, was this infinite and self-sufficing Being to be brought into touch with human littleness and sin and sorrow? Only by the connecting link of incarnation. Through the Logos, the eternal, self-revealing Word, God must become man and enter into the experience of those whom He would redeem. Definition after definition was devised to safeguard the rich and many-sided significance of this truth, and to ward off every error. We read of *οὐσία, ὁμοούσιος, ὁμοιούσιος, ὑπόστασις, πρόσωπον*—subtle technical terms which only the philosophically trained can fully understand. Yet such abstract terms are just as useful and necessary for the proper interpretation of the spiritual universe as the equally

abstract generalisations of modern science are necessary for the interpretation of the physical universe. In neither case are the warm concrete realities of life disparaged or ignored.

There emerged the creeds, which express the Church's effort and desire, not in the first place to define ultimate reality, but rather to guard all that was precious in the original Christian revelation, and to repel all assaults of disintegrating error. They are to be regarded as carefully placed buoys, warning the faithful where treacherous sandbanks lie, and pointing to the only safe channel of spiritual navigation. What had to be expressed in a single statement were the fundamental facts of both history and experience. Christ clearly had His place in the historic time-process, but He was also absolute, central, timeless, and authoritative to the Christian consciousness. These two things must be held together and unhesitatingly, even if paradoxically, affirmed. If the nature and will of Christ were *not* divine as well as human, His work (it was felt) could not be regarded as redemptive. After many controversies the formula was at last slowly and painfully beaten out which registers the final triumph of the Church over all forms of heresy, over Judaisers and pagans, Gnostics and Manicheans, Arians and Donatists, Nestorians, Eutychians, and Apollinarians. Jesus Christ is to be worshipped by the devout as Very God of Very God ; the Second Person of the Trinity ; begotten, not made ; having two natures, human and divine, in the unity of a single person ; of one substance with the Father in respect of His Godhead ; of one substance with

ourselves in respect of His manhood ; co-eternal with God and with the Holy Spirit before all worlds in glory and in majesty.

II

The Nicene synthesis suggests a few comments from the modern point of view.

In the first place, we note that it represents a clear victory of Hellenism over Hebraism. The Hebrew mind tended to think of God and man as akin, and to interpret Christ spiritually, by means of the mutual and reciprocal interpenetration of the divine and the human in a single personality, through unique inspiration on the one hand and perfect obedience on the other. The Greek mind thought dualistically of God and man, as violently disparate and incommensurable, and as yoked together in the person of Christ only through some inexplicable and miraculous conjunction. The Hebrew thought ethically, in terms of personality and moral will ; the Greek metaphysically, in terms of nature, being, substance. The former therefore saw the union of God and man culminating chiefly in the cross of Calvary ; the latter saw it from the beginning in the cradle of Bethlehem. The one emphasised atonement; the other, incarnation.

In consequence of all this, the Greek interpretation of Christ tended to become monophysite, placing the *real* seat or locus of His personality in the divine nature (as being pre-existent and of a greater dignity), and never doing full justice to His human nature. Jesus was regarded as primarily a heavenly being who assumed humanity, divinising it for a while

from above, and so adding mortality as it were to His other experiences, but who resumed His true nature and glory at the resurrection.

The defect of this view is that it arrives at its conclusions by deductive reasoning from *a priori* theories regarding the pre-existent Word, instead of starting from the historic Jesus of Nazareth, whom it consequently fails to understand, both morally and psychologically. The Nicene theologians, says Dr. Fairbairn, "in contending for the Deity of the Son, too much forgot to conceive Deity through the Son, and as the Son conceived Him." *

A further objection is that the Nicene Creed imposed upon the Church a bare statement of belief in certain historic facts and abstract metaphysical propositions, as a test of churchmanship, instead of some affirmation of loyalty and loving personal adherence to the living Christ. This over-intellectualising of Christianity was to have serious and far-reaching consequences.

The language of Nicea seems archaic to us to-day; its cosmogony and psychology, its philosophic categories and presuppositions, are no longer ours. Can a statement of ultimate metaphysical reality, we ask, be expressed in words or reached by the human mind? If it can, what ground is there for believing that it was infallibly arrived at sixteen centuries ago, and is not open to revision any more? Would Jesus Christ Himself, confronted by the Athanasian Creed, have approved the claims, definitions, threatenings, thus put forward in His name? Would He even have understood them? We may ask

* *Christ in Modern Theology*, p. 91.

these questions and yet sincerely venerate the creeds for the services they rendered to a past age. They mark a great watershed in the history of Christian doctrine, definitely separating those streams of faith which are consistent with the worship of Christ as Lord from those which are inconsistent with it, and so directing the water of life into the most widely irrigating and fertilising channels. Were the Church of Christ to-day to formulate its creed afresh, the terminology it adopted might be very different from that employed by the Greek and Latin Fathers, but it is probable that the conclusions reached would in the end be substantially the same.

III

According to the teaching of mediæval Scholasticism, as exemplified by its greatest representative, Thomas Aquinas, the goal of all human effort is the full satisfaction of man's innermost desire for a vision of God in which love and knowledge shall be ideally combined. Of these two, love may be the higher and more eminent in dignity, inasmuch as it is in the love of God that our perfect beatitude consists ; yet knowledge is the more essential in its nature, since in order to love God it is necessary that we should know Him. But who is sufficient for either of these things ? The highest human faculty is intrinsically incapable of apprehending Deity. Some life-giving germ must be imparted to it from without to supplement and reinforce its inherent impotence.

This is provided by the divine revelation of God in Christ, as authenticated by miracles and officially

proclaimed by an authoritative Church. Such a revelation is supra-rational and belongs to faith, yet it is by no means irrational or opposed to reason. On the contrary, it is the highest function and privilege of reason to recognise and even to confirm the truths which are thus communicated to it. That which is of itself inaccessible to human reason, and therefore not subject to its verdict, which is to be accepted on authority and not judged, nevertheless turns out on examination to be rationally credible and true, though it still far transcends even enlightened knowledge. Especially is the ineffable mystery of the divine nature made known to us in the Eucharist, where supernatural truth takes a form sensible to perception, and Christ the eternal and transcendent Spirit assumes a vesture determined by conditions of time and space.

Here was material for endless philosophical inquiry. How were the temporal and the non-temporal related in the Eucharist? In what manner did the physical elements contain and convey a spiritual gift? It was obvious that Christ was not on the altar before the act of consecration in the sense in which He was present after it. Yet how could He *come* to be there, when He never left heaven, and was simultaneously present in every place? If the bread and wine "became" the body and blood of Christ, this involved a change and a beginning. Yet how could this be predicated of One who was the same from everlasting? The substance or underlying essence of the sacrament was the body and the blood of Christ, its accidents were those of bread and wine. How then, in transub-

stantiation, did the substance change, while the form, the accidents, remained the same ?

Thomas Aquinas answered, in effect, that with God all things are possible. He can change substance but not form, as easily as He can change form but not substance. At the priest's consecrating word the whole Christ becomes present in every fragment of bread or drop of wine. He may therefore be partaken of in either kind, received by the priest alone on behalf of all, adored in the Host, reserved for the sick and dying. At the same time He is ubiquitous on all altars where the same sacrifice is offered. The bread and wine as accidents are corruptible and local ; Christ, as the divine Subject in whom these accidents inhere, is imperishable and universal.

It would be easy to disparage these reasonings as hair-splitting sophistications, which come perilously near to contradicting reason, even if they actually fall short of doing so. Yet we cannot but admire the respect here shown for the freedom and power of the human mind in unravelling the mysteries of the divine nature, as offered to its reverent inquiry and contemplation. The criticism may justly be made, perhaps, that Aquinas in his speculations too far departed from the historic Jesus, and wandered into regions of abstract metaphysical speculation which were barren because so remote from the Church's living experience of salvation. This tendency was to be corrected in part by Martin Luther, who based his Christology not on metaphysics but on faith.

Yet we must not forget that Scholasticism was intensely devotional in its aim and outlook. Aquinas

was no mere reasoner, but a fervent saint and lover of Christ Jesus, deeply imbued with Neoplatonic mysticism. His four hymns, written for the office of the festival of Corpus Christi, show what intense rapture the doctrine of transubstantiation could inspire. Indeed, what is remarkable in him, and in the Scholasticism for which he stands, is the combination of acute metaphysical subtlety with simple piety and a whole-hearted acceptance of superstitious elements in the Mass which go back to the oldest traditions of animistic magic. "Thomas Aquinas and Thomas à Kempis represent, amongst the great Christian writers, almost the extreme limits of the cultivation or neglect of pure intellectualism, yet they are alike in finding their supreme inspiration just in that sacrament which has retained at its very heart, undisguised and yet transfigured, the clearest notes of its historic relation to the weird imaginings of primitive man." *

IV

The patristic and scholastic philosophies of religion were alike based on the dualistic assumption that God was in some sense the opposite of man. He was the Absolute, an infinite, eternal, and unchanging Being, whose true home was on the other side of nature and humanity, and who indeed remained, in inaccessible and sole majesty, when everything temporal and finite was dissolved away. Two consequences followed from this view. If Christ was to be interpreted to the Church as divine in this sense, He became clothed with abstract metaphysical

* P. H. Wicksteed, *Reactions of Dogma and Philosophy*, p. 529.

and transcendental attributes which made His humanity seem altogether unreal. If, on the other hand, emphasis were laid on His human aspect, there seemed no possibility of crossing the gulf which separated Him from the divine nature, as above conceived. The result was a war of controversialists, who could find no common ground because they were wrangling with one another about mutually exclusive terms.

It was reserved for Hegel to suggest a new metaphysical and ontological interpretation of the relation subsisting between these two opposites. He maintained that the Absolute exists, not independently or by itself apart, but only in its manifestation through nature and man, and in its return to the consciousness that it is so manifested. The world-process realises the true nature of the Eternal Mind. History follows a strictly logical dialectic or sequence of ideas. Ultimate reality in this view is not static but dynamic. The divine nature is not so much an abyss of being as a process of becoming. Even the Infinite loses Himself to find Himself and dies that He may live. God exists as an all-embracing, everlasting movement, coming to His own through the balance of contraries, the clash of opposites. We must direct our thought, therefore, neither to a transcendental infinite cut off from the finite, nor yet to a conditioned finite severed from the infinite, but to a fusion of the two in a higher unity, in which the human and the divine, the earthly and the heavenly, matter and spirit, the concrete and the abstract, the particular and the universal, the immanent and the transcendent, are perfectly reconciled.

Hegel's reasoning led to some highly important and valuable conclusions. He saved the doctrine of the Trinity for pure thought, demonstrated the rationality of the idea of incarnation, and found a place in metaphysics for the infinitely detailed process of universal history. God is the ultimate unity which expresses itself manifoldly as thesis, antithesis, synthesis. This unfolding of the divine Being through trial and experiment, this continual going out of Himself that He may find Himself again, becomes explicit in everything that happens, and especially in the great religions of the world, which are in a sense the chief mode of God's own self-realisation. The culminating point is reached in Christianity, which thus becomes the absolute religion, and utters in terms of customs, symbols, and institutions what philosophy better expresses in terms of pure thought. Christ as Son is the principle of differentiation within the Godhead, through whom the creating and self-revealing Father attains to perfect self-expression, in order that He may return to Himself again in the higher synthesis of the Holy Spirit. Thus Jesus is the revealer, the recipient of revelation, and also the revelation itself, all in one. He is God arriving through man at the full consciousness of Himself. And all this, though dialectically arrived at in the realm of ideas, has its exact counterpart also in the realm of history. "Christ has appeared; a Man who is God, God who is Man; and thereby peace and reconciliation have accrued to the world." *

The chief objection to this system as an explana-

* *Philosophy of History* (ed. Sibree), p. 336.

tion of Christianity is its tendency to intellectualism and excessive generalisation. It diminishes human freedom, forces the details of history into a Procrustean bed of philosophic theory, subordinates religion to speculative thought, and leaves us, not with the personal God of Christianity, but with the ultimate notion or *Begriff* and its philosophical implications. A racial and universal incarnation of the divine mind, in which we all share, takes the place of a personal incarnation thought of as historical and unique, and the full self-consciousness of God is withheld from the beginning of the world-process, and is assigned only to the end.

Instead of rising from the Jesus of history to the thought of God as Father, Hegelianism starts from abstract speculative thought and descends upon history by a process of dialectic. Indeed it may almost be said that Hegel's scheme of thought comes to Christ through the idea of incarnation rather than reaches the thought of incarnation through our knowledge of God as we meet with Him in Christ. With the system as a whole the person of Jesus would seem to have no necessary connection, since the dialectical world-process might well have fulfilled itself without Him. Christianity is thus raised to absolute rank as a religion, but at the cost of sacrificing its historic root in the unique personality of its Founder. Moreover, the system of Hegel is trinitarian and incarnational rather than redemptive. With too facile optimism it makes the actual the rational, finds a justification for moral evil, and uses the Absolute to explain and vindicate everything that is. In avoiding the precipice of dualism

Hegel falls into the morass of monistic pantheism, with the result that we are left with a reasoned philosophic faith in the dogmas of the Trinity and the Incarnation, rather than a personal religious faith in the incarnate Son of God and the Saviour of the world. When we try to see Jesus through the study of Hegel's philosophic principles, too often it happens that we are left gazing upwards into heaven and a cloud receives Him out of our sight.

V

Since Hegel, there has been a strong movement of reaction against the metaphysical interpretation of reality in general and of Christianity in particular. Metaphysics has been defined by Michelet as "the art of bewildering ourselves methodically." Are we justified, it may be asked, in attempting to grasp the ultimate meaning of existence with minds that are meant to guide us only among phenomenal realities? Is anything gained by attempting thus to soar "beyond the flaming ramparts of the world"? Should we not desist from these presumptuous Icarus flights, which only burn our wings, and keep closer to the ground of everyday experience? On this view ontological speculation as such is to be discouraged at the outset. It may have imaginative and artistic worth for us, but it affords no clue to ultimate reality. "Metaphysics," says a leading exponent of Humanism, "seems doomed to remain inferior in objective value to the sciences, which are essentially 'common' methods of dealing with phenomena." *

* F. C. S. Schiller, in *Contemporary British Philosophy*, vol. i., p. 409.

Even those systems of thought which to-day endeavour to envisage reality as a whole are not always very favourable to a distinctively Christian interpretation of the universe. According to modern philosophical Realism, for example, mind itself is no more than a very late product of cosmic development, and it comes into existence only when a high degree of biological complexity has been reached. Mind rests on Life, and Life on Space-Time, and throughout the whole structure all that we can discern is a *nisus towards* some kind of deity which is ever progressively superseded and outgrown. "The world in its infinity tends towards infinite deity, or is pregnant with it, but that infinite deity does not exist. . . . The attainment of deity makes deity finite. . . . God as an actual existent is always becoming deity, but never attains it. He is the ideal God in embryo." * In this view the greater part of existence is non-rational, and mind and spirit are present, not at all in the foundation stones, but only in the topmost turrets of the cosmos. How, in such a system, the unique place is to be given to Jesus Christ which the Christian consciousness assigns to Him, and which He claims for Himself, is not very clear.

On similar grounds we may find unsatisfying the pragmatic Fictionalism which contends that there is no such thing as objective "truth" at all. In our plastic and accommodating universe we have to make truth, or its equivalent, for ourselves as we go along. "We are always stretching forth to larger and better fictions which answer more truly to our

* S. Alexander, *Space, Time, and Deity*, vol. ii., p. 365.

growing knowledge and experience." * Man in this view is not properly a metaphysician, but rather a metaphorician. His guiding faculty is not reason but imagination. He is much more an artist than he is a philospher or a dispassionate observer. What we have chiefly to do is to sublimate the life-force, in the interests of progress, and to put our faith in whatever projected fiction of the mind will most harmoniously satisfy our various needs, treating that fiction, for all practical purposes, as if it were really true. Even religion may not hope to come into contact with ultimate reality. Its business is not to reach truth, but to poetise our needs and aspirations. Whatever can be brought within the sphere of exact knowledge thereby becomes material for science, and no longer for religion.

Once more, Vitalism would interpret the universe, not in terms of reason or imagination, but in terms of will and action, while Pluralism, recognising the individual character of all experience, would doubt whether there be a universe at all. Similarly, the views of Einstein and the neo-physicists could condemn beforehand any attempt to discover the ultimate meaning of the universe, on the ground that all human thought, like all measurement of space, is merely relative to the subjective source of reference whence it proceeds. Again we ask, Where in all these systems is there room for a metaphysic that will satisfy the Christian's conception of the place that is due to Christ ?

While these new systems of thought have been coming more and more to the front in the last half-

* Havelock Ellis, *The Dance of Life*, p. 94.

century, interests other than metaphysical have been increasingly demanding our attention. The enormous development of the physical sciences has given to men's minds an empirical and naturalistic, even a utilitarian and commercial, bias. The growing complexity of civilisation has forced social and industrial questions to the front. Ethical and humanitarian problems have claimed precedence over metaphysical speculation. At the same time the extension of historical research has undermined many of the foundations of the old dogmatism, and new investigations in psychology have thrown considerable doubt on some traditional beliefs by revealing the functional needs they serve and the manner in which they have arisen in our minds.

This general tendency of recent times has had a profound effect upon Christology. Slowly but surely there has arisen a weakening of interest in the Christ of dogma and ecclesiastical authority and metaphysical speculation, and an extension of interest in the Christ of history and experience. Jesus has been considered in His manward rather than in His Godward aspect, as communicating to us His consciousness of the Father rather than as effecting some mysterious reconciliation for us in the realm of the supernatural. The modern mind wishes to retain the experience of Christ's redemption from sin and self into the new life of forgiveness and fellowship and service, but is increasingly disposed to reject the old explanations of this experience which rest upon a metaphysical or dogmatic basis. We tend to think more of the Christ in us than of the Christ for us or the Christ beyond us ; and many to-day

are deeply interested in the attitude of Jesus to social problems who would never for a moment trouble their heads about His supposed place in a triune Godhead prior to the creation of the world.

Illustrations of this anti-metaphysical trend of modern thought may be found in both Schleiermacher and Ritschl. Whereas Kant took the moral or ethical standpoint in interpreting Christianity, and Hegel the intellectual, Schleiermacher approached it through the emotions. Religion to him meant the feeling of dependence upon God and the inward experience of renewal through fellowship with the historic Jesus, which was of immediate and unquestionable spiritual value, but quite independent of any wider rational or speculative significance. The rich fact of regeneration through Christ was inward, experimental, and psychological, and it required for its authentication no dogmatic or metaphysical interpretation whatsoever. Schleiermacher, in effect, gave us a Christ who created and who sustains the Church, but of whom we cannot say that He is veritably God incarnate.

Similarly, Ritschl held that Christianity was never meant to help us to fathom the ultimate secrets of the universe. From the metaphysical, the mystical, and the sentimental, in all their forms, he turned to the historical, the positive, and above all the practical. Leaving transcendental theories aside, and keeping to the solid ground of history and experience, he would say that Jesus, through the Church, which is the community of loving and loyal souls, lifts us to His own glad fellowship with God, and so redeems us, helping us to serve God in our ordinary vocations.

Such value-judgments as these ought to suffice for us. With existential judgments regarding the metaphysics of the Godhead, or Christ's eternal relations with the Father, we are not properly concerned.

VI

Nevertheless, in spite of these discouragements, it is inevitable that the human mind should attempt to account for the whole of reality in which it finds itself. Even the feeling of dependence involves some metaphysical implications, which in Schleiermacher's own case proved to be those of immanental pantheism. As for religious value-judgments, the heart cannot very long or very securely rest in them unless it can feel confident that they have objective validity and justification also. For the Christian some satisfying metaphysic is imperatively necessary if the relation of Christ to reality in general, and to ourselves in particular, is to be properly understood. After all, if there be a God, who asks us to identify our wills with His, and who invites us to share His life through the fellowship of love, it is reasonable to suppose that He will wish us to know something of His mind also, and the true significance of that wondrous universe in the midst of which He has brought us into being.

The system of philosophic thought which seems to be most in harmony with the spirit of Christianity is that of metaphysical Idealism. This maintains the objective reality of universals, and posits the existence of an all-inclusive experience or spiritual consciousness which embraces, and at the same time

transcends, the infinite diversity of all finite and created things. Modern idealism, however, would disclaim the philosophic dualism which often characterised this system of thought in the ancient world. Instead of regarding the Infinite Spirit as an impassive, changeless, and self-existing Being, coming ready-made, as it were, into relation with something else from without, it is disposed to think of the Absolute as subsisting only in and through its manifestation in the particular and the circumstantial. "The revelation of the infinite in the finite is the eternal fact of the universe." * In this view, kernel cannot be separated from husk, nor husk from kernel. History is all of a piece. The natural aspires to the supernatural, through an infinitely graded series of values, because it is already penetrated by it and pregnant with it. The divine apart from the human is as much an abstraction as the human apart from the divine. Only through homogeneity can either of them be rightly known.

This point of view presents a satisfactory philosophical basis for the doctrine of incarnation. "The great deed that seems to emerge as the life of Christ is the bringing into one of God and man: the discovery that the supernatural is in the natural, the spiritual in the physical . . . the immanence of the divine, not as a new and imported element in human life, a special bit of man peculiarly holy, but as the truth and life in life." † If in the totality of things matter exists for the sake of spirit and as a

* A. S. Pringle Pattison, *The Idea of God*, p. 414.
† W. Wallace, *Lectures and Essays*, pp. 49–50.

means to spirit, and if spirit in its turn exists for the realisation, through matter, of eternal values of goodness, truth, and beauty, in finite individuals, then nowhere is the essential character of the world-process so clearly or fully revealed as in the life and death of Jesus. We can say that God is Love, here and now, everywhere and always, because of Him. His acts, that is to say, have more than an historical, they have a cosmical significance and value. If there be a key to the riddle of the universe it is the Cross of Christ. The metaphysic of Christianity is grounded in its soteriology.

VII

It only remains to add three closing observations.

Firstly, the divinity of Christ rests on a moral and spiritual rather than on a merely physical or metaphysical basis. It was progressively achieved through human prayer, effort, and obedience, just as it was perpetually sustained by divine help, guidance, and inspiration. In other words, Christ was and is a Theanthropic Person, in whom the divine self-emptying through grace and the human self-perfecting through faith simultaneously find their unique meeting ground and their supreme embodiment. Kenosis and plerosis here go hand in hand. Being spiritual rather than corporeal, the incarnation of God in Christ is to be seen more in His cross than in His cradle, more in His death than in His birth, more in Calvary than in Bethlehem.

Secondly, the incarnation of God, though historical and unique in Christ, was never intended in Him to be static, isolated, exclusive, limited to a single

individual. On the contrary, it was meant through Him to be dynamic and influential, reproducing itself in many brethren, till all that is human shall have become divine. "Although Christ finally conquered evil in the true centre of the universe, *i.e.*, in Himself, the victory over evil on the circumference of the world, *i.e.*, in the collective whole of humanity, has to be accomplished through humanity's own experience. This necessitates a new process of development in the Christian world, which has been baptised into Christ but has not yet put on Christ" (V. Solovyof, *The Justification of the Good*, p. 194).

Thirdly, the consummation of these things, though in the Cross fully guaranteed, is not yet. Christianity requires a transcendental order for its complete unfolding. Only in eternity can the full significance of time and history be revealed.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CHRIST OF ART

THE Jesus of history appears to have been but little interested in the artistic side of life. It is true that He admired the lilies of the field, but it may be said that He did so more because of what they religiously suggested of the providence of God than because of any appeal they may have made to the æsthetic sense. A fine action, such as the breaking of an alabaster box of ointment over His feet, probably made a deeper impression upon Jesus than any lovely object, such as the alabaster box itself; and He could view with perfect equanimity the approaching destruction of the temple buildings in Jerusalem, with all their wealth of decorative treasure.

In His whole attitude to beauty Jesus was conditioned by the circumstances of His incarnation and His special mission to the world. He came to a severely monotheistic people who, in marked contrast to the polytheistic Greeks, abhorred idolatry in every form, tended to produce prophets rather than artists as exponents of religious feeling, and lived under the frown of an ethical command which sternly forbade, as impious and futile, all attempts to represent the unapproachable transcendence of the divine by means of mimetic art. "To whom

then will ye liken God, or what likeness will ye compare unto Him?" Moreover, it was the peculiar vocation of Jesus to deal with primary rather than with secondary things, to impart to the world a new spirit of life and power rather than to concern Himself with the imaginative expression of it in terms of loveliness. His appeal was to moral obedience and religious faith, not to æsthetic taste. He came, that is to say, not to charm men, but to save them, to regenerate and not merely to refresh.

At the same time, though Jesus as redeemer rendered infinitely greater service to mankind than ever He could have rendered as creative artist, He nevertheless gave to art its greatest opportunity and its divinest themes. The principle of incarnation itself, with its suggestion of the embodiment of the divine in an external form, is germinative of æsthetics, no less than of ethics and of religion. Inasmuch as Jesus perfectly realised the beauty of holiness in His own person, the love and adoration He inspired could not but find, sooner or later, its appropriate artistic and imaginative expression. Dogma and conduct were not enough. Men were everywhere constrained to utter, not only what they believed about Christ, but also what they passionately felt regarding Him, and this demanded the emotional medium of art, both as a means of personal imaginative satisfaction, through the expression of inward joy, and also as a vehicle for the communication of faith and love to others. No subject of study could be more fascinating. The Church's changes of outward fortune from bitter persecution to prosperity and power, its successive phases of theological

belief, the varying temperamental characteristics of the races it subdued, are all reflected in the history of Christian art.

I

The first apostles, preoccupied with the task of proclaiming Christ's Gospel to the world, never dreamed of trying to represent, by arts which they despised, the features of One whom they expected shortly to see coming in the clouds of heaven. We have, therefore, no authentic tradition regarding the physiognomy of Jesus. The grave and bearded type of face to which we are accustomed, with its benign expression, its flowing locks, its mild yet steady and intimately searching eyes, is a late and rather expressionless creation, no more to be accepted as historically veracious than the features said to have been impressed on the napkin of Veronica.

The most interesting early representations of Jesus are those preserved in the frescoes and sarcophagi of the Roman catacombs, from the third to the sixth century. Here we note a remarkable absence of all reference to the cross and passion of our Lord, as well as to the incidents of His life. The early Church, being without an artistic tradition to start with, and having not yet evolved an art-form of its own, borrowed its style from classical Greek art, and represented Christ first of all as a joyous, fresh, radiantly beneficent and beardless Orpheus or Apollo. The distinctive message of Christianity, however, was bound ultimately to transcend the measured and self-contained classicism of Greece and Rome. Its

good news of heavenly grace and sacrificial love, its emphasis on suffering, its suggestion of infinitude and the higher mysticism, could not be adequately expressed in so formal and conventional a style. Partly for this reason, and partly from a desire not to attract attention, the first Christians preferred to depict their Lord under the form of some symbolic emblem, such as the fish, the dove, the lamb, the phœnix, the door, the anchor, the palm of victory. The art of this period is radiant and serene, cheerful even amid the tombs. Christ appears to His persecuted saints as the consoler of the sorrowful, the sure bringer of joyful immortality, the calm and tender Lord of the unseen world, whose anguish indeed is past and out of mind, and whose elevation to the realm of trinitarian dogma has not yet come.

II

Constantine's adoption of Christianity as the State religion of the Roman Empire, in the fourth century, exercised a profound influence on the development of art. It meant that the Galilean, having conquered, could now emerge from the catacombs and take His rightful place upon the throne. The Church's consciousness of victory asserted itself in many ways. The cross of Christ, combined with the sacred monogram, became the accepted symbol of Christianity. On every side the spread of the new faith manifested itself in the erection of stately churches. Also the spirit of the time found characteristic expression in the overthrow of heresies and in the elaborate formulation of the creeds of orthodoxy. From the fourth

century onwards we witness the rise to power of Eastern Christianity, the prolonged Christological, trinitarian, and iconoclastic controversies, the struggle with the growing menace of Islam. All these factors combined to substitute oriental for Hellenistic influences, and to produce the figure of Christ as He is specially presented to us in Byzantine art.

Here several things are to be noted. In the first place, the close proximity of Mohammedanism, with its scorn of idolatry, made impossible any representation of Christ by statuary, such as the Greek genius naturally favoured and the later Western Church freely indulged in. Images, indeed, were not officially permitted till the second Council of Nicea in the year 787. In the second place, the rapid erection of commodious churches everywhere rendered it desirable that their large wall spaces should be filled with some scheme of artistic mural decoration, to serve as the picture-books of the illiterate but devout worshippers therein assembled. Both these tendencies favoured the development of mosaic art, especially in the fifth and sixth centuries, and Jesus soon came to be represented in the apses of basilicas, with prophets and apostles on either hand, outlined in sharp little fragments of dazzling blue enamel and lustrous gold, with every accompaniment of barbaric ornamental splendour.

The *aspect* of Christ here represented is of great interest and importance. His contemporary victories, both in the realm of State policy and in the councils of theologians, as well as the place assigned to Him in a sumptuously rich scheme of architect-

ural decoration, made it natural that He should be set forth in all the magnificence of kingly power, robed in stateliness, enthroned in majesty, with the orb of sovereign authority resting upon His knee, and one hand raised in solemn benediction. To have depicted Christ in humiliation and suffering, at this stage, would only have exposed Him to the jibes of scoffers and the derision of blasphemers. Consequently everything was done to suggest the sublime, the authoritative, the awe-inspiring. The Christ who here figures is the Christ of the Apocalypse rather than of the Gospels. The historical interest, even the æsthetic, is here completely subordinated to the doctrinal and the didactic. Whereas the Roman catacombs represented Christ as cheerful, compassionate, friendly, the Byzantine churches represented Him as awful, remote, transcendental, as God the Son rather than as the Son of God.

Particularly noticeable is the fact that there is not yet any attempt to represent faithfully and realistically the countenance of Christ. All is conventionalised into a fixed rigidity of pattern. The eyes are staring, the features are expressionless, the drawing and anatomy are far from faultless, and a supernatural nimbus or glory now for the first time radiates from the unearthly countenance. It is a stiffening and petrifaction in art corresponding to what was taking place contemporarily in the formulation of the creeds. Soon we shall have the poor grotesque daubs and miracle-working icons of the Holy Orthodox Church of Russia. Only after many centuries of adoration, and in the West, was

the glory of God in the *face* of Jesus Christ to be made really lovable and gracious.

III

Christian art fared badly between the seventh and the twelfth centuries. It was a period of almost universal tumult and unrest. The splendid fabric of the Roman Empire was in process of dissolution; irresistible bands of wild and uncouth barbarians were overwhelming the ancient civilisation on every side ; and the Church was grappling with the task of endeavouring to convert them. During these upheavals the only place where art could possibly flourish was the monastery. Here at least was leisure undisturbed and the quietness of ordered peace. Here, in the tranquil retirement of his cell, the monk who loved the beauty that is allied to faith could devote himself to his craft and be content.

The character of Christian art was during this period naturally conditioned by the circumstances in which it was pursued. No longer was it necessary or desirable to cover the walls of churches with frescoes or mosaics. Not yet had there arisen a demand for altar paintings or the capacity to paint them. It was an age of artistry in miniature, such as the skilled craftsman could undertake, single-handed, in the solitary seclusion of his monastic cell. There were missals to be illuminated, prayer books to be copied, altar vessels to be embellished, croziers to be carved in gold or ivory, gospels to be ornamented with initial letters or marginal decorations. In all such art the figure of Christ was conventionalised and even subordinated to the pattern of

which it formed a part. The aim of the skilled craftsman was decorative rather than representational. What he set out to do was not to edify or teach the faithful, but rather to produce that which was likely to give pleasure simply because it was beautiful. This, too, was a tribute to Jesus Christ, the Lord of all things lovely and of good report. The fondly elaborate pencillings of the leaves of flowers, the masterly designing of inextricably interwoven spirals and knotted coils in Celtic art, the occasional droll humour and love of diablerie shown in the representation of character and incident, all indicate an imagination gloriously set free by Christ in the service of the Church, and taking delight in beauty of design for its own sake.

With the thirteenth century there came a further development. That marvellous age, the age of Dante and Giotto, of Thomas Aquinas and Francis of Assisi, witnessed the efflorescence of Gothic art, the most characteristic contribution of the northern imagination to Christianity. Here again the formal, decorative, æsthetic interest displaced the representational. Christ, that is to say, was not directly set forth in a French cathedral, as He was in a Byzantine fresco or an Italian painting. Yet He remained the inspirer of its ideal beauty, and the whole wonderful structure was erected in His honour. It is impossible here to do more than allude to the glorious achievements of this form of art. Gothic architecture combines the Roman classical sense of unity, order, and proportion with the Teutonic romantic feeling for variety, mystery, and limitless aspiration. The pillared aisles and loftily vaulted roof suggest

the deep gloom of the Germanic forests and also the comprehensiveness of heaven's overarching sky. Columns and traceries exhibit, with infinite detail, the variegated wealth of nature's loveliness, in bird and animal, in tree and flower. All that the glory of light and shade can say to the soul of man speaks from the cool cloisters, the darkened sanctuary, the glittering windows with their blaze of colour, the little lamp that steadfastly throws its beams from above the altar. Figured sculptures in porticoes and niches, duly attended by angelic and devilish besettings, tell of the long drama of divine redemption, from the creation of the world to the Last Judgment. Even grotesques and gargoyles sportively proclaim the joyous merriment and fun which spring from faith. In the midst is Christ, the ever-recurring theme of all this splendid symphony of stone, the one divine Being entitled to preside over the exquisite harmony and peace of the whole structure. A cathedral represents the world first reconciled and then brought, an artistic unity, to the feet of Jesus. Few things in art are finer than the statue of Christ which adorns Chartres Cathedral, or the representation of Him as Le Beau Dieu at Rheims. But even when He is not visibly set forth in stone, every masterpiece of Gothic architecture is a tribute to His conquest of the human spirit, His power to dominate, not only man's intellect and will, but also his sense of the altogether lovely.

IV

When we trace the influence of Christ upon the pictorial art of the later Middle Ages, one or two

tendencies stand out very clearly. In the first place, loving and minute attention is now for the first time given to the features of Jesus Christ. Greek sculptors, in carving their statues of gods and goddesses, were content, if only they secured a beautiful and harmonious proportion of all the parts, to leave the faces expressionless and blank, since the figures were primarily intended to represent, not certain individuals, but rather some abstract virtue or quality personified. Byzantine art, as we have seen, because of its theological prepossessions, failed to do justice to the face of Jesus, and generally depicted it in the form of a fixed and stereotyped and even scowling mask. But the painters of the later Middle Ages vied with one another in putting the utmost amount of spiritual expression into the countenance of Christ. They endeavoured to portray Him in every possible aspect, with the emphasis laid, now on the divine, now on the human side of His personality, now on the perfect blending of the two.

Very interesting, further, is the revelation which mediæval art gives of the Church's conception of the relation of Jesus to His mother Mary. In the earlier period Mary is subordinated to Jesus, but she gradually takes her place beside Him and even, in some cases, it would seem, above Him, as the supreme embodiment of pitifulness and love, in contrast with His sterner justice and unapproachable transcendence. Moreover, the conception of Mary herself changes in the most interesting manner, sometimes within the development of a single artist, as in the case of Fra Angelico. For the divine and queenly dignity of the Madonna there is gradually

substituted a humanly sweet and most endearing motherliness. In much the same way the babe Jesus, from being an obviously divine and redemptive child, becomes more and more a genuinely human infant.

Further, in mediæval art the appeal of the Atonement is felt to be no less moving than that of the Incarnation, and pictures of the crucifixion of Jesus are fully as numerous as those of His nativity. Here again we may trace a process of development. In the early history of the Church, as we have seen, the sufferings of Christ were not much dwelt upon. Attention was rather concentrated upon His heavenly triumph and His eternal glory. But in the Middle Ages, when the gloom of life was felt to be denser and more oppressive, and when self-macerating ideals of ascetic holiness prevailed, the tortured figure of the Saviour was thrown into greater prominence. Christ the Good Shepherd became Christ the Bleeding Victim. In part, this was but a morbid dwelling on physical pain and horror. The sublimity of the cross vanished, only its woe remained ; the bodily agony was emphasised, the spiritual victory obscured. Yet there were numerous instances in which art triumphed over even this intractable material, and exhibited the glory of Christ as chiefly manifested in His bodily weakness and humiliation. Pain was sublimated to the point of loveliness, and the soul's conception of beauty was enlarged, far beyond anything a Greek could have approved, so as to include the moral beauty of suffering divine holiness and love in their purest form.

V

The great age of naturalism in Christian pictorial art begins with the Florentine Giotto in the early fourteenth century. In his paintings the joyousness and love begotten by the recent Franciscan revival of religion found moving and beautiful though somewhat crude expression. Here the grandiose and spectacular, the conventional and ecclesiastical conceptions of Christ were put aside, and an attempt made to depict Him in a more historical and human manner. Not long afterwards came Fra Angelico, a Dominican, pre-eminent among Italian painters for his deeply impressive and sincere religious sentiment. He excelled in strength and tenderness of facial expression, and set his Madonnas and saints and angels in the loveliest Renaissance backgrounds of architectural decoration, with blue sky above them, flowers beneath their feet, and everything suggestive of a glorious spring morning. Angelico's frescoes of the transfiguration and crucifixion of Christ, in the convent of San Marco, at Florence, have never been surpassed for beauty of composition, spirituality of feeling, or pure grace of style.

Botticelli, another artist of the Florentine school, has painted Christ for the most part either as a child in His mother's arms or as a dead man about to be entombed. In all his work we notice a faultless mastery of lineal design, combined with a certain air of literary wistfulness, and the sad-sweet melancholy of semi-renounced paganism. Leonardo da Vinci's study of the face of Jesus, as He sits with His

disciples at the Last Supper, casts a peculiar spell upon the beholder by reason of its technical perfection and the elusive mysteriousness and pathos of its enigmatic spiritual expression. In Michael Angelo, Greek and Christian elements united to produce a sculpturesque and magnificent sublimity which reminds us of Milton. His unfinished *tempera* panel of the dead Christ, now in the National Gallery, is a much more beautiful and moving study than the celebrated Vatican fresco of the Last Judgment, in which Christ is represented as a muscular and brawny giant, the very embodiment of inexorable wrath, hurling the damned to perdition with thunderbolts, and raising His arm in a gesture of threatening and dreadful menace, before which even the apostles cower in terror. It is scarcely surprising that this picture should rouse the indignant reprobation of the poet Shelley.*

Turning from the Tuscan to the Umbrian school of painters, we note the serene beauty and glowing quiet peacefulness and charm of Perugino's pictures of the Saviour. This artist greatly influenced Raphael, whose placid and refined Madonnas all the world knows, but whose representations of Christ in "The Transfiguration," "The Disputa," and the cartoons of South Kensington, are no less remarkable for their finished grace and loveliness. In Raphael the influences of Christian tradition and of the new classical Renaissance blend in the consummate achievement of pure beauty, sense helping

* See the letters to Peacock and Leigh Hunt, dated February 25th and September 3rd, 1819.

soul as much as soul helps sense. Piero della Francesca saw in Christ the masculine vigour and austere solemnity which impress us when we read the Gospel of St. Mark.

The Venetian school has given us some noteworthy masterpieces of Christian art. Bellini always imparted to his paintings of Christ an aspect of grave dignity and solemn beauty. In Giorgione's fine picture of Jesus carrying His cross we are made to feel that the pain, tragedy, and shame of the great sacrifice are completely lost sight of and forgotten in the patient and gentle love with which the Saviour gazes searchingly out of the picture into the eyes of the beholder. When we come to Titian we note the beginnings of a preponderance of technical skill over spiritual insight and religious feeling. Even the rich simplicity of the face of Christ in the painting of "The Tribute Money," now in the Dresden Gallery, is not wholly satisfying for this reason. In Tintoretto and Paul Veronese this decorative tendency has gained strength. The significance of Christ in the picture has almost been made subordinate to a general scheme of rich imaginative colour or architectural design. The spirit of art is in danger of overpowering the spirit of religion.

Other Italian schools have given us Luini's suggestive study of the youthful Jesus, at Milan, and his magnificent fresco of the Crucifixion, at Lugano; Andrea del Sarto's amiable but rather feeble-looking Christ; and the wholly satisfying "Pieta" of Francia, now in the National Gallery.

Only the briefest mention can be made of Flemish art. Van Eyck's great masterpiece in Ghent Cathedral ably sets forth Christ as the Lamb of God receiving the adoration of the Church throughout the ages. Memling has given us a noble imaginative conception of Christ as the Second Person of the Trinity, an exceedingly difficult subject for art to deal with.

Among Spanish painters, El Greco, by the fervid intensity and symbolism of his portraiture, well exemplified by his painting of Gethsemane in the National Gallery, has profoundly influenced modern impressionist art. Velasquez, in the Prado Museum at Madrid, has worthily depicted the grandeur and sublimity of the death of Christ. Here we have not so much a body tortured as a soul surrendered. The meek obedience of the Son of God, the last great loneliness, the cry of dereliction, and the undying love willing to suffer death for all mankind, are imaginatively suggested, with consummate art, in that divine figure with the widely outstretched arms and drooping head.

VI

The Reformation, as we might expect, brought powerful influences to bear upon Christian art. The violent revulsion from Roman Catholic ceremonies and doctrines led to a parallel rejection of everything with which such doctrines and ceremonies were associated. Crucifixes, statues, altar-pieces, paintings of the Madonna, stained-glass windows, were looked askance at, as idolatrous and superstitious,

pagan obscurations of Christ's divine glory, hindrances rather than helps to spiritual worship. The new evangelical conception of religion was ethical rather than sacramental ; it appealed more to the conscience than to the devout imagination.

Such reforming tendencies led to two results. On the one hand, the artistic expression of Christian feeling was very nearly suppressed altogether, as among the iconoclastic followers of John Knox, in Scotland, and the advocates of extreme Quaker simplicity of worship in England. These zealots, who resembled Plato in being more susceptible to the moral perils of sensuous beauty than to its æsthetic charm, drove out art from the temple of Christianity as with a whip of cords, in their desire that God's sanctuary should once more become a house of prayer and no longer a museum of the fine arts. This Puritan movement undoubtedly arrested the development of Christian art for a time, yet by enriching the moral soul of the whole Church of Christ, it rendered very real and exceptionally valuable service to the artistic impulse in the end, though in a roundabout way.

On the other hand, the new religious ferment of the Reformation in due course found its own appropriate æsthetic and imaginative expression. Luther wrote hymns and Bach cantatas, as Handel somewhat later wrote oratorios. Above all, Dürer, Cranach, and Rembrandt painted pictures. In these something of the old mysticism and idealism of Catholic Italian piety in art was certainly lost. Instead of the cerulean clearness and serenity of the south we have the rough, gnarled vigour, the ethical depth

and seriousness of the north. Above all, through the Reformation impulse Christian art became homely and realistic. It is interesting to contrast the queenly Madonnas of Correggio or Fra Angelico with the familiar, domestic Madonna of Hans Holbein. Christ, too, has become human and friendly and sympathetic, the Son of Man rather than the Son of God, yet with a heavenly love about Him that renders Him divine. The supreme representative of this tendency is Rembrandt, in whom alone idealism has not been sacrificed though realism has been gained. Rembrandt sometimes gives to Jesus the almost repellent features of a poor Jewish peasant of Dutch extraction. Yet His aspect is so tender, His look so gentle and appealing, the character behind it is so strong as well as loving, the scenes in which He moves are so homely and so dramatically arresting, that we are haunted by Rembrandt's pictures as by no other. Rembrandt, too, is peculiarly Christian in finding the divine among the poor and heavy-laden rather than at rich men's feasts in costly palaces, such as the Venetians loved to represent.

Rubens, as an exponent of Christian art, is not to be compared with Rembrandt. All he appeared to see in Jesus was an opportunity for depicting gross fleshliness and brawny muscularity. Whereas Rembrandt gave us the spiritual man even when he painted peasants, Rubens gave us the natural man even when he painted Christ. To his pictures of Christ, Van Dyck gave an air of graceful dignity and refinement, but he, too, lacked the note of genuine moral insight and spirituality.

VII

In more modern times some interesting developments are to be noted. The Tractarian revival of religion in the nineteenth century in England brought back to the Church a wealth of seemly vessels, beautiful altar cloths, artistic decorations, and a greater definiteness of dogmatic statement. The movement influenced a group of painters whose representations of Christ show true reverence and sincerity. Rossetti's sketch of Christ's features in the picture of Mary Magdalene is tenderly appealing. Holman Hunt, in "The Finding of Christ in the Temple" and "The Shadow of Death," painted Christ with rich allegorical suggestiveness and a minute attention to detail. In "The Light of the World" he represented Jesus, less attractively, in a priestly, regal, and artificial aspect. "Christ in the Home of His Parents," by Millais, is a simple picture which will please many. In the art of Burne-Jones we are either attracted or repelled by the far-away look of eternal sadness he gives to the features and especially to the eyes of Jesus.

Other modern painters, such as Vernet, Dyce, Hole, Tissot, Hofmann and Munkácsy, have laboriously introduced into their art an exact archæological reproduction of the social, historical, and geographical circumstances of the life of Jesus, no doubt as a protest against former mystical and conventional representations. This may be interesting, but it is not at all necessary or important, and it is the mark of a scientific rather than of an artistic age. Shakespeare did not have to visit Verona in

order to give correct local colour or an air of verisimilitude to *Romeo and Juliet*. True art is independent of such careful realism ; it is concerned with the spirit rather than with the letter. One would much rather see Jesus of Nazareth laid to rest in a Renaissance monument, by disciples wearing mediæval costume, amid the flowers and shrubs of an Italian spring, if this be done naively and artistically, than see Him painstakingly but unsatisfyingly depicted among the actual conditions of Judea in the first century.*

A still more modern tendency is shown in the works of von Uhde, Zimmerman, Copping, and others, who endeavour to place Jesus in the actual surroundings of the present day. These represent Him as making His appearance in a workman's cottage, taking a very shy and open-eyed Indian or English child to His embrace, consoling a war-widow, or revealing His presence to a healthy boy-scout or a dying soldier on the field of battle. Not all these pictures are meritorious from an artistic standpoint. There is a spectral quality about the Jesus they bring before us, an attempt to combine the mystic and the realistic, the historical and the contemporary, which perplexes the imagination and is not quite convincing. Yet they are interesting because they show that the modern mind is anxious to realise Christ's nearness and to relate Him in some living way to the problems and difficulties of ordinary experience.

In very many contemporary representations of

* Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (part v., chap. xi.) contains an interesting discussion of the representation of Christ in art.

Christ there is an anæmic mawkishness and vapid sentimentality of characterisation which is greatly to be deplored. An exception must be made in the case of Epstein's fine statue of the Risen Christ, a conception abounding in masculine tenderness and primitive elemental force. Mr. Eric Gill's " Stations of the Cross," in Westminster Cathedral, are also noteworthy. On the whole, contemporary religious art is disappointing. It may be that the imaginative interpretation of life's higher spiritual realities is passing more and more from the realm of painting to the subtler and more expressive emotional world of music.

CHAPTER IX

THE CHRIST OF POETRY

We have seen that the imaginative utterance of feelings inspired by Christ was necessarily hampered by the limitations of Greek art. The conventions of old classicism could not express the warmth of Christian feeling. Greek art was quite content to remain within the bounds of the natural, but Christianity was most at home in the supernatural. It yearned to give artistic form to its experiences of divine grace, its sense of the infinitude and wonder of the love of Jesus Christ upon the cross. This was rendered possible by the invention of oil painting. A canvas gave to Raphael what no piece of statuary could ever have given even to Pheidias, an opportunity of expressing feeling through the medium of perspective, composition, lineal design, the endless delicate gradations of light and shade and, above all, the glory and mystery of colour. The emotional value of these things for Christian art was boundless.

Yet painting, too, had its limitations. A picture might have formal beauty of the highest kind, yet it lacked the grace of movement. It could not express a *succession* of emotional states. With eagerness and delight, therefore, the Christian spirit overflowed into music. Here the range of emotional expression was indefinitely extended.

Soul could take flight to soul on the wings of sound. Music brought to the temple of all the arts a melting inwardness, lyrical spontaneity, the infinite complexity of changing moods, and an appeal to the most spiritual of our senses, the sense of hearing.

The shortcoming of music, however, was that it was vague, elusive, over-subjective as a medium of expression. It lacked, what the other arts supplied, the explicit concrete definiteness of objective representation. This defect was, in a measure, made good by poetry. Poetry possessed nearly all the advantages of which music could boast. Its medium also, though still sensuous, was spiritual rather than material, the medium of sound and not stone or canvas. It, too, had movement and melody and rhythm and infinite variety. But it had also, what music lacked, the conciseness of definitely expressed thought, and it might have, in addition, something corresponding to the rich colour schemes of painting, the pure clear outline of white statuary, the massive structural strength of architecture. Poetry is the crown of all the arts, the most perfect and flexible medium of imaginative expression ever devised by the mind of man. For this reason it is noblest in dignity among the handmaids of religion. There are occasions on which even Theology, Queen of the Sciences, must yield precedence to Poetry, Queen of all the Arts.

It would be a fascinating subject of study to survey the whole field of Christian verse, including the hymns of the Church. But space, like art itself, has its appointed limits, and in this chapter we can only glance at a few outstanding references to Christ

in English poetry. Before dealing with individual writers, we may note, in passing, that the drama had its historical origin in the ceremonies of the Church and that some of the most interesting references to Christ in all our literature occur in the early miracle plays. The beautiful and anonymous *Quia Amore Langueo*, included in several anthologies of religious verse, is an attractive early anticipation of Francis Thompson's *Hound of Heaven*.

I

Langland shows us the figure of Christ as He was conceived by an ardent social reformer of the fourteenth century, the age of Wyclif and John Ball. At a time when bishops were spending on hawks and hounds what ought to have been given to the poor, when the Black Death was abroad, iniquitous labour laws were in force, and the peasants of England were moved to rise in sullen revolt against their masters, a passionate dreamer from the Malvern Hills depicted Christ as the ideal comrade and emancipator of oppressed humanity.

> For all we are Christ's creatures, and of His coffers rich,
> And brethren as of one blood, as well beggars as earls.*

Very beautiful and original is Langland's description of Christ's entry into Jerusalem, not as a meek Jewish Messiah, but as a bold mediæval knight, clad in the helm and habergeon of Piers the Ploughman, and ready to joust with the false fiend, Satan, for the salvation of the world.

In a similar spirit, though in a very different

* *The Vision of Piers the Ploughman.*

manner, did the courtly and cheerful CHAUCER think of Jesus Christ as the first pattern and begetter of all true gentility.* A man may acquire wealth or be born to high estate, says Chaucer, he may even rise to be bishop, king, or emperor, and yet wholly lack the nobility of soul which alone gives greatness, and of which Jesus Christ is the supreme exemplar.

> This firste stok was ful of rightwisnesse,
> Trewe of His word, sobre, pitous, and free,
> Clene of His goste, and loved besinesse,
> Ageinst the vyce of slouthe, in honestie;
> And, but His heir love vertue, as dide He,
> He is noght gentil, thogh he riche seeme,
> Al wear he mytre, croune, or diademe.†

To the interpretation of Jesus Christ EDMUND SPENSER brought the new ardour of the Renaissance spirit, an inborn love of Platonic mysticism, a fondness for mediæval chivalry and romance, and a growing sympathy with English Puritanism. All these influences inspired the picturesque imagery, the noble sentiment, and the grave sweet music of *The Faerie Queene*. But it is in the *Hymne of Heavenlie Love* that Spenser most directly and ecstatically extols Jesus Christ as the Redeemer who left the bosom of eternal bliss in order to become a thrall and restore fallen man to his once happy state.

> O blessed Well of Love! O Floure of Grace!
> O glorious Morning Starre! O Lampe of Light!
> Most lively image of Thy Father's face,
> Eternall King of Glorie, Lord of Might,

* Compare Dekker's suggestive tribute: "The first true gentleman that ever breathed."

† From a poem called *Gentilesse*. The lines are probably a reflection on King Richard II. For another expression of the same thought, see *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, ll. 1109–1124.

Meeke Lambe of God, before all worlds behight,
How can we Thee requite for all this good ?
Or what can prize that Thy most precious blood ?

The last of the great Elizabethans, JOHN DONNE, in *A Hymn to Christ, at the Author's last going into Germany*, has given us an exceedingly fine example of his concentrated passion, bold hyperbole, paradoxical ratiocination, rich metaphysical subtlety, and sonorous music. In this brief poem the menacing storm-cloud, the engulfing sea, the ship labouring amid the waves, the sap of a tree keeping its roots alive amid the frosts of winter, even the jealous pangs of disappointed love, all of them suggest Christ and His redemption to the sombre broodings of the poet in a spiritual crisis of his life.

II

The religious poetry of the seventeenth century in England presents some interesting features. Perhaps the most important link connecting Spenser and Milton is *Christ's Victory and Triumph*, by GILES FLETCHER. This long poem grandiloquently describes Mercy prevailing over Judgment in heavenly places, the victory of Christ over the tempter in the wilderness, His triumph over the fear of death through joyful obedience to the Father, and His final lordship over all things through the resurrection. These themes Fletcher adorns with a fanciful embroidery of poetical rhetoric which is sometimes exceedingly beautiful and sincere, sometimes wholly affected and artificial. The following passage, for example, taken from a description

of the person of the Son of God, is in questionable taste :

> His cheekes as snowie apples, sop't in wine,
> Had their red roses quencht with lillies white,
> And like to garden strawberries did shine,
> Wash't in a bowle of milk, or rose-buds bright
> Unbosoming their brests against the light.

HERRICK is not much better. He was at heart a pagan, who ought by nature to have played upon panpipes in Arcadia, but who happened to spend his days within the peaceful seclusion of an Anglican parsonage in Devonshire. His devotion to Christ was no doubt genuine enough, but one has the impression, from reading *Noble Numbers*, that its author could only come to the cross of Christ by way of the village maypole or a country bridal. His spiritual approach remained essentially secular and heathen. As a modern critic has aptly expressed it, Herrick is quite happy " if he be allowed to crown the infant Saviour with daffodils, or pin a rose into its stomacher." *

In GEORGE HERBERT we have a seventeenth century courtier and fastidious scholar transformed into a country parson, a meek saint, and a passionate lover of the grave and seemly ritual of the Church of England. His verse, like Keble's, gives us the distilled fragrance and spiritual quintessence of the Book of Common Prayer. The following lines provide a good illustration of his quaint religious fancy :

> Jesu is in my heart, His sacred name
> Is deeply carved there : but th' other week
> A great affliction broke the little frame
> Ev'n all to pieces : which I went to seek :

* E. Gosse, in Ward's *English Poets*, vol. ii., p. 129.

And first I found the corner, where was *J*,
After, where *ES*, and next where *U* was graved
When I had got these parcels, instantly
I sat me down to spell them, and perceived
That to my broken heart He was *I ease you*,
and to my whole is *JESU*.

Richard Crashaw, as a Roman Catholic, composed many poems in honour of the Virgin Mary. In these, and in his verses addressed to Christ, we are attracted by the tender and flaming ardour of the author's sentiments, yet at the same time repelled by the cloying sweetness, the elaborate ingenuity, the over-profusion of tinsel and meretricious ornament, with which these sentiments are generally expressed.

As for Henry Vaughan, his characteristic quality is to be found, not in the facile verses which he composed on the sacraments and festivals of the Church, but rather in such a poem as *The Night*, in which he makes the visit of Nicodemus to Jesus the occasion of a meditation on Christ's own habits of solitary prayer and the mystic's approach to God in the darkness and silence of the night seasons.

III

In *Paradise Lost* our great Puritan poet, John Milton, brings before us the Christ of the empyrean, remote, majestical, sublime. As the effulgence of the Father's glory, and the express image of His person, the Son of God appears throughout the poem in several aspects. First of all, He is the central figure in an elaborate scheme of substitutionary redemption, which He Himself expounds to God the Father in speeches of great eloquence (III.

238–265). Again we meet with Him as the chief agent of God's indignation in the tremendous battle which takes place in high heaven between the angelic and the demonic hosts. As the avenging Son of God speeds upon cherubs' wings to the fierce onslaught, He girds the sword of might upon His thigh and grasps ten thousand thunders in His right hand. Even His chariot wheels are composed of spirits, whose innumerable glaring eyes flash lightnings everywhere (VI. 760–766).

Later He comes forth, crowned with divine radiance, girt with omnipotence, equipped with "sapience and love immense," to thwart Satan, subdue old chaos, and create new worlds for the glory of God the Father. As He issues on this sublime errand, the golden gates of heaven swing back upon their hinges, to let the King of Glory pass upon His way (VII. 192–215). Next, Christ is represented as the agent of God in judgment and redemption, no less than in creation. He is man's advocate and intercessor before God, who offers to interpose His own divine merits and shameful death between man's sin and the doom he has deserved (XI. 22–24). "So only can high justice rest appaid" (XII. 401). Finally He is described, in Gabriel's prophecy to Adam, as resuming, amid endless jubilees and hallelujahs, the heavenly dignity which once in pitying love He had laid aside:

> Then to the heaven of heavens He shall ascend
> With victory, triumphing through the air
> Over His foes and thine; there shall surprise
> The serpent, prince of air, and drag in chains
> Through all his realm, and there confounded leave;
> Then enter into glory, and resume

His seat at God's right hand, exalted high
Above all names in heaven; and thence shall come,
When this world's dissolution shall be ripe,
With glory and power to judge both quick and dead;
To judge the unfaithful dead, but to reward
His faithful and receive them into bliss.*

The whole conception is vast and magnificent in the highest degree, though it is marred occasionally by polemical vehemence and bigotry. With tireless poetical invention, rare metrical skill, unequalled boldness and swiftness of imagination, Milton gives sensuous and artistic form to the abstract ideas of Puritan theology. Never elsewhere, perhaps, save in Dante's great poem, has the whole mythological scheme of the Christian doctrine of redemption been so sublimely and poetically presented. The Christ of Milton is a being possessing every attribute of solemn grandeur, yet the remote loftiness of the region in which He moves, and the clear foreknowledge with which everything is planned for Him beforehand, considerably reduce our interest in the spectacle of His achievements.

The Christ of *Paradise Regained* is much less convincing, though He has now professedly become human. There are passages of exquisite description in the poem, but we cannot be brought to believe in a Christ who overwhelms the tempter in the wilderness with disdainful reprimands, wearisomely pedantic arguments, deft allusions to classical mythology, and copious floods of pompous Miltonic rhetoric. The Christ who, with blazing eloquence,

* XII. 451–462. No brief extract from *Paradise Lost* does justice to the splendour of Milton's style. His *Hymn on the Morning of Christ's Nativity* is a beautiful tribute which must not be overlooked.

discourses at great length to Satan on the nature of true kingship, is really voicing the sentiments of English Puritanism in the seventeenth century.

IV

The Christ of William Blake was in some respects but the idealised replica of Blake himself. He was imagination personified, the essential artist,* the champion of free, unimpeded self-expression, the arch-foe of Voltaire and Rousseau, of Bacon, Locke, Gibbon, Sir Isaac Newton, and all deists, critics, sceptics, and rationalists whatsoever. Above all, as the palpitating lines of *The Everlasting Gospel* suffice to indicate, Blake's Christ was the direct antithesis of the Christ commonly worshipped in English churches :

> The Vision of Christ that thou dost see,
> Is my vision's greatest enemy.
> Thine is the Friend of all Mankind,
> Mine speaks in Parables to the blind.
> Thine loves the same world that mine hates,
> Thy heaven-doors are my hell-gates.

The whole poem should be read carefully for its indignant repudiation of the Christ of ordinary British Christianity. "I know of no other gospel," Blake wrote, "than the liberty both of body and of mind to exercise the divine arts of imagination. . . . The Apostles knew of no other gospel." † In the expression of his views Blake went to unreasonable extremes. But we must greatly value his emphatic protest against every attempt to make Jesus a pliable

* "The mocker of art," Blake wrote, "is the mocker of Jesus."
† Introduction to *Jerusalem*, part iv.

and weak figure, with a message that could easily be accommodated to the prejudices of commonplace morality:

> I am sure this Jesus will not do
> Either for Englishman or Jew.*

According to Blake, Christ is Son of Man in the widest possible sense, and therefore to be discerned in "mercy, pity, peace, and love" everywhere. Very fine is Blake's passionate faith in a manifestation of Christ in our own day, not in Palestine but in Great Britain:

> And now the time returns again:
> Our souls exult: and London towers
> Receive the Lamb of God to dwell
> In England's green and pleasant bowers.†

A kindred spiritual idealist of the period was SHELLEY. To the interpretation of Christ he brought a mind steeped in the writings of William Godwin, a fanatical faith in the doctrines of the French Revolution, a love of Platonic philosophy and Greek drama, and the bitter feelings of one who felt he had a grudge against society. The result was that he conceived of Jesus as above all a Promethean deliverer of humanity from priests and tyrants. Shelley desired, as it were, to save Christ from Himself, as He had come to be misinterpreted by His own Church. "It is of importance"—so a note added to *Queen Mab* informs us—"to distinguish between the pretended character of Christ as the Son of God and the Saviour of the world, and His real character as a man, who, for a vain attempt to reform the world, paid the forfeit of His life to that

* *The Everlasting Gospel.*
† From *Jerusalem*, part ii.

overbearing tyranny which has since so long desolated the universe in His name. Whilst the one is a hypocritical demon . . . the other stands in the foremost list of those true heroes who have died in the glorious martyrdom of liberty, and have braved torture, contempt, and poverty in the cause of suffering humanity."

These sentiments found expression in *Prometheus Unbound*, in lines which contrast the pure and genial humanity of Christ with that caricature of Him which, in Shelley's opinion, had cast the blight of superstition upon later generations:

> One came forth of gentle worth
> Smiling on the sanguine earth;
> His words outlived Him, like swift poison
> Withering up truth, peace, and pity.
>
> . . . .
>
> Hark that outcry of despair!
> 'Tis His mild and gentle ghost
> Wailing for the faith He kindled:
> Look again, the flames almost
> To a glow-worm's lamp have dwindled.*

In the same poem (I. 604) Prometheus refuses even to utter the name of Christ, since "it has become a curse." That is to say, the evils done in the name of Jesus have almost eclipsed, in Shelley's view, the good accomplished by His person.

A similar conception is to be met with in *Hellas:*

> A power from the unknown God,
> A Promethean conqueror came;
> Like a triumphal path He trod
> The thorns of death and shame.
>
> . . . .

* Act I., ll. 546–558.

Hell, sin, and slavery came,
Like bloodhounds mild and tame,
Nor preyed, until their Lord had taken flight.

We note from the splendid choruses in this poem that Hellenism exercised a stronger spell over the mind of Shelley than Christianity did. When "the world's great age begins anew," it is to Athens, not to Jerusalem, that purblind humanity will turn for light and leading:

Saturn and love their long repose
Shall burst, more bright and good
Than all who fell, than One who rose,
Than many unsubdued.

In *The Triumph of Life* Christ is referred to, with Socrates, as one of

the sacred few who could not tame
Their spirits to the conquerors—but as soon
As they had touched the world with living flame
Fled back like eagles to their native noon.

Shelley's conception of Christ expanded as he grew older, and though he called himself an atheist, in angry defiant challenge of the sanguinary deity associated in his mind with the reigning Calvinism, he really possessed more of the spirit of Jesus than the majority of his contemporaries who reviled him. There is truth in the verdict of Robert Browning: "I shall say what I think; had Shelley lived, he would finally have ranged himself with the Christians."

V

Of the bracing and exultant faith of Robert Browning there could never be any doubt. It was

life and health and joy to so robust a spirit to know once for all, through Christ, what neither science nor philosophy sufficed to prove, that "the All-Great [is] the All-Loving too." * In the light of such a faith everything becomes transfigured. The world "means intensely, and means good." † As the climax and consummation of all man's upward striving, life's "topmost, ineffable, uttermost crown," the poet exclaims "see the Christ stand!" ‡ The doctrine of the Incarnation gripped Browning because it seemed to satisfy the deepest longings of humanity, and to offer a solution of man's fundamental problems:

> I say, the acknowledgment of God in Christ,
> Accepted by the reason, solves for thee
> All questions in the earth and out of it. §

Browning was not much concerned with the earthly story of the life of Jesus, save as it afforded an opportunity for the psychological study of perplexed but fascinated contemporary observers. What he valued in Christianity was not its questionable details (for in these days of historical criticism "Colenso's words have weight"), but rather its general character and redemptive mission:

> 'Tis the faith that launched point blank her dart
> At the head of a lie—taught original sin,
> The corruption of man's heart.‖

In harmony with the teaching of F. D. Maurice and the pantheistic tendency which was associated with

* *Epistle of Karshish.*
† *Fra Lippo Lippi.*
‡ *Saul.*
§ *A Death in the Desert.*
‖ *Gold Hair.*

the scientific movement of the nineteenth century, Browning took on the whole a mystical view of Christ. He thought of Him, not as a prodigy appearing in the remote past, and imprisoned in the historical conditions which revealed Him, but as the crowning and supreme disclosure of God's immanental union with all humanity. Hence the naturalness with which, as in *Christmas Eve*, Browning discerns the presence of Christ in every community of those who sincerely love Him. Hence, too, his buoyant, optimistic confidence in the future of humanity. Christ is not among the grave-clothes of the past. He is risen. He is one with the progressive and self-sacrificing spirit of love that governs the ages, and our surest guarantee of a glorious immortality:

> That one Face, far from vanish, rather grows,
> Or decomposes but to recompose,
> Become my universe that feels and knows.*

The pressure of nineteenth century religious doubt weighed much more heavily on TENNYSON than it did on Browning. Where Browning marched on confidently, with firmly planted foot and head erect, and a ringing note of certainty in his voice, Tennyson groped hesitatingly and paused, picking his steps timorously and cautiously. *In Memoriam* begins, full of promise, with the splendid line :

> Strong Son of God, Immortal Love.

But a wistful pathos of dubiety immediately takes possession of the poem and leaves the bereaved

* Epilogue to *Dramatis Personæ*.

author with nothing more than little systems, broken lights, and a beam in the darkness which he trusts may come from Christ. The Incarnation never swept Tennyson off his feet, never carried him exultingly to the heights, as it did Browning. The unique moral teaching of Jesus, His unsullied purity of character, His "loveliness of perfect deeds, more strong than all poetic thought," Tennyson could admire as much as any one :

> Thou seemest human and divine,
> The highest, holiest manhood, Thou.*

Yet he never seems to have thought of Christ as the final solution of all human problems, the pivot, so to speak, round which the universe revolves. After the glowing rhapsodies of Browning, the following very guarded tribute seems a little tepid :

> Tho' truths in manhood darkly join,
> Deep-seated in our mystic frame,
> We yield all blessing to the name
> Of Him that made them current coin.*

One feels that Tennyson, through some paralysis of faith, just misses giving to Christ that place of honour which the occasion might seem to suggest. *In Memoriam* arrives at a belief in the immortality of the soul, but not by way of the resurrection of the Son of God. We hear time and again of the Christmas bells, but very little indeed of the Christmas message. A glorious consummation of the ages is anticipated, a restitution of all things :

> And one far-off divine event
> To which the whole creation moves.*

* *In Memoriam.*

Yet the part which the Lord of history is to play in bringing about this event is not hinted at ; all we have is a rhetorical reference to " the Christ that is to be." The poem even contains an allusion, surely gratuitous, to Christ's inability to preserve in perfect purity the souls of those that love Him:

> What keeps a spirit wholly true
> To that ideal which he bears ?
> What record ? Not the sinless years
> That breathed beneath the Syrian blue.

On the whole, Tennyson's references to Christ are lukewarm and half-hearted. Many modern hymn-books contain the opening lines of *In Memoriam* and also the verses from Cardinal Newman's *Dream of Gerontius* beginning " Praise to the Holiest in the height." No contrast could be greater than that between the wailing cadences and melancholy agnosticism of the former and the crisp dogmatism, the heartening, jubilant note of the latter.

VI

As a poet SWINBURNE renounced Tennyson and all his works. Like his contemporary, Samuel Butler, he was violently repelled by the spirit prevailing in the Victorian age, its smugness and self-complacency, its comfortable and worldly piety, its unctuous sentiment, its reverence for Mrs. Grundy. All these things were anathema to him, and his repugnance extended itself to the Christ of respectable and conventional British Christianity. Swinburne regarded the ecclesiastically and dogmatically conceived Jesus as the source of half the miseries into which a corrupted religion had plunged many

millions of mankind. In this he resembled Shelley. The poet's charge against such a Christ was that He had driven Apollo and Proserpine out of the world, and robbed humanity of the perfectly innocent and healthy joys of sensuous and beauty-loving paganism:

> Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean; the world has grown grey from Thy breath;
> We have drunken of things Lethean, and fed on the fullness of death.*

Such a baleful perversion of man's fundamental instincts, however, was surely temporary and could not finally prevail:

> Wilt Thou yet take all, Galilean? But these Thou shalt not take:
> The laurel, the palms, and the pæan, the breasts of the nymphs in the brake;
> Breasts more soft than a dove's, that tremble with tenderer breath;
> And all the wings of the Loves, and all the joy before death.*

Swinburne apparently cherished no grievance against Christ Himself. He could speak of Him as

> The sweet-souled Saviour of a man-tormented earth.†

Yet it was impossible for the author of *Hertha* and *The Hymn of Man* to smother his indignation when he contemplated the "Christian creeds that spit on Christ." The crucifix, he thought, represents a priest's Christ, not the real Christ of history and of the Gospels, who even now is suffering once again in all the travailings of oppressed humanity. Only when we remember this fact, and bear in mind that Swinburne directed his splenetic virulence, not

* *Hymn to Proserpine.* See also *The Last Oracle.*
† *Blessed Among Women.*

against the Christ of Galilee, in so far as he understood Him, but against what he considered to be a distorted Christ, the ascetic emaciated Christ of ecclesiastics and theologians, can such a poem as *Before a Crucifix* be read with patience :

> Nay, if their God and Thou be one,
> If Thou and this thing be the same,
> Thou shouldst not look upon the sun ;
> The sun grows haggard at Thy name.
> Come down, be done with, cease, give o'er ;
> Hide Thyself, strive not, be no more.*

VII

Recent and contemporary verse abounds in felicitous allusions to Jesus Christ. Only a few instances can here be cited. COVENTRY PATMORE, in harmony with the traditional spirit of Christian mysticism, thought of Christ chiefly as the heavenly spouse or bridegroom of the soul. FRANCIS THOMPSON resembled William Blake in pointing out that England, no less than Palestine, may be the scene of the divine manifestation:

> Yea, in the night, my Soul, my daughter,
> Cry, clinging heaven by the hems ;
> And lo, Christ walking on the water
> Not of Gennesareth, but Thames ! †

All are familiar with his conception of Christ as the Hound of Heaven, who pursues His own with a love

* Compare the lines of Mr. Herbert Trench :

> "The Man upraised on the Judean crag
> Captains for us the war with death no more.
> His kingdom hangs as does the tattered flag
> Over the tomb of a great knight of yore."
>
> *Stanzas to Tolstoi in his Old Age.*

† *The Kingdom of God.*

that will not let them go until it bless them. Not so well known are the beautiful lines, *Ex Ore Infantium*, in which he helps us to see Christ through the imagination of a little child.

Mrs. Meynell, in *The Fugitive*, showed how Christ, dismissed though He may be by the garrulous tongue and ungrateful heart of the sceptic, nevertheless comes back again to satisfy men in the cornfield and the vineyard, the sheaf and the grape, as these typify and produce the bread and wine consecrated upon the altar to represent His body and His blood. She also speculated suggestively, if somewhat fantastically, on other revelations of Christ that may have been given by God to other worlds :

> No planet knows that this
> Our wayside planet, carrying wind and wave,
> Love and life multiplied, and pain and bliss,
> Bears, as chief treasure, one forsaken grave.
>
> Nor, in our little day,
> May His devices with the heavens be guessed,
> His pilgrimage to thread the Milky Way,
> Or His bestowals there be manifest.
>
> But in the eternities
> Doubtless we shall compare together, hear
> A million alien Gospels, in what guise
> He trod the Pleiades, the Lyre, the Bear.*

It is to be noted that all the three poets last named were Roman Catholics.

Mention should be made of *The Everlasting Mercy*, by John Masefield, which powerfully describes the manner in which Christ saves a soul debauched by drink and devilry. First, the real

* *Christ in the Universe.*

nature of his crimes is brought home to him by the faithful accusing words of a good woman :

> " Saul Kane," she said, " when next you drink,
> Do me the gentleness to think
> That every drop of drink accursed
> Makes Christ within you die of thirst,
> That every dirty word you say
> Is one more flint upon His way,
> Another thorn about His head,
> Another mock by where He tread,
> Another nail, another cross,
> All that you are is that Christ's loss."

Afterwards, Christ comes to be known by this drunken sot as the power that brings life out of a dead soul, even as, in the realm of nature, God brings young green shoots of sprouting corn out of the dull and lifeless clods of earth:

> O Christ who holds the open gate,
> O Christ who drives the furrow straight,
> O Christ the plough, O Christ the laughter
> Of holy white birds following after.

Many more tributes might be quoted, but they would only echo, in diverse ways, the tribute paid to Jesus by F. W. H. Myers, in the closing lines of his poem on St. Paul :

> Yea, thro' life, death, thro' sorrow and thro' sinning
> He shall suffice me, for He hath sufficed :
> Christ is the end, for Christ was the beginning,
> Christ the beginning, for the end is Christ.

CHAPTER X

THE CHRIST OF SOCIAL SERVICE

The Church of Christ in the course of its long history has passed through many phases. At one time it has been pre-occupied with missionary propaganda ; at another, with the careful intellectual definition of its beliefs. As occasion has demanded, it has devoted itself to the painting of pictures or the building of cathedrals, or it has fought for the principles of civil and religious freedom, or it has perfected the ceremonial of rich liturgical worship. But Christianity, it is more and more recognised, has its political and economic, no less than its evangelical, devotional, philosophical, and artistic aspects, and to-day we are specially called upon to grapple with industrial and social problems in their relation to the Gospel.

Ours is admittedly a secular and utilitarian, rather than a worshipful or idealistic age. We dislike miracles, question the supernatural, chafe under authority, find it very difficult to believe in traditional doctrines of sin or of salvation, and are not at all sure that there is either a heaven or a hell. What then ? "Meantime," so Robert Browning reminds us, "there is our earth here—well !" Let us busy ourselves with that. What a relief to be able to *do* something ! An anti-dogmatic bias may have its

advantages for those who can seriously attend to only one thing at a time. It may enable us to concentrate on social reform.

It cannot be denied that the deep unrest of our age makes this matter extremely urgent. Modern industrialism, largely the product of unrestricted egoistic competition and an enormous increase of our command over the forces of nature, has had deplorable results. It has led to conditions totally unforeseen by primitive Christianity, such as the swarming of vast populations into enormous cities, the rise of gigantic trusts and powerful trade unions, the complicated network of international finance. Many attempts have been made in this country, from the days of Piers Ploughman to those of Parson Lot, to bring the social system into closer harmony with the principles of Christianity ; but it would seem that, of all human interests, man's industrial and economic relationships are the most difficult to evangelise. The time has now come, however, when some Christian solution of our problems must be found, if civilisation itself is not to suffer shipwreck. Most people are convinced, not only that Jesus Christ has something to say on these problems, but that with Him alone their ultimate solution lies. Indeed, the man in the street is very much inclined to judge the Church of Christ to-day, no longer by old doctrinal or sacramental tests, but simply by its desire, and by its power, to render social service to mankind. In these circumstances it may be well to examine afresh, in the light of history and experience, the connection of Jesus Christ with forces so complex and so important.

THE CHANGING CHURCH

I

There are, of course, those who maintain that Jesus is still, what He always was, more than anything else a social reformer. A labouring man Himself, He worked at a carpenter's bench for many years, then assumed the leadership of a small band of men of the fisher class and tramped the country, preaching the Gospel of a renewed society in which the down-trodden and disinherited should come to their own at last. Both by example and by teaching He ranged Himself with the poor and against the rich, befriended the outcasts and socially despised, gave His life to healing the sick and feeding the hungry, and finally met His death as the result of the machinations of His bitterest foes, the priestly families of the aristocratic and wealthy classes. When a new society came to be founded after His death, to perpetuate His influence, it promptly and inevitably endeavoured to express His mind by organising itself on the principles of communistic socialism.

Such writers ask that this aspect of the world's Saviour should be restored to its rightful prominence. The workers, we are told, are not attracted by the Christ that is offered to them by the Churches. Not only is He too far removed from them by elaborate ceremonies and supernatural dogmatic claims, but also (what is a far greater stumbling block) He is falsely exploited by the Church to buttress up an oppressive capitalistic system to which His whole teaching is fundamentally opposed. The Jesus of the New Testament, it is said, if He were among

us at the present day, would openly identify Himself with revolutionary Socialism. He would become a leader of the Labour Party and a member of the House of Commons. Any Church, therefore, which professes to represent His spirit should unreservedly throw in its lot with the working classes and champion their rights in the competitive industrial struggles of the hour.

Three selected quotations will serve to illustrate this general point of view: " If we wish to represent Jesus correctly, we must not place Him among colonnades and near altars, but among small cottages and on the side of country ways. Jesus was not condescending in the ordinary sense of the word, but He was poor, simple, unassuming, like those for whom He lived. Who can contemplate with indifference the consumption in our barracks of labour, the infant mortality in our industrial centres, if he feels but one breath of the great soul of Jesus ? Do you think that Jesus would have remained calm if He had heard that thousands of school children have no dinner ? He would have said, as He said in the wilderness, ' Give ye them to eat.' " *

" The modern Christ would be a politician. His aim would be to raise the whole platform of society. He would not try to make the poor contented with the lot in which they cannot be better than savages or brutes. He would work at the destruction of caste, which is the vice at the root of all our creeds and institutions. He could not content Himself with denouncing sin as a merely spiritual evil ; He would go into its economic causes, and destroy the

* Friedrich Naumann, *Jesus as a Man of the People.*

flower by cutting at its roots—poverty and ignorance. . . . Christianity according to Christ is the creed of human progress, not that of resignation to the unavoidable miseries of class. It is an organisation having politics as means and the equalisation of classes for its end. It is communism." *

"I am ready to admit that after contemplating the world and human nature for nearly sixty years, I see no way out of the world's misery but the way which would have been found by Christ's will if He had undertaken the work of a modern practical statesman. . . . Christ is not the lifeless harmless image He has hitherto been to you, but a rallying centre of revolutionary influences which all established States and Churches fight. . . . Christianity, good or bad, right or wrong, must perforce be left out of the question in human affairs until it is made practically applicable to them by complicated political devices. . . . Decidedly, whether you think Jesus was God or not, you must admit that He was a first-rate political economist. . . . The political, economic, and moral opinions of Jesus, as guides to conduct, are interesting and important: the rest is mere psychopathy and superstition. . . . Our reason and study lead us to believe that Jesus was talking the most penetrating good sense when He preached Communism." †

II

These statements doubtless contain a large measure of truth, and point to neglected aspects of

* E. Lynn Linton, *The True History of Joshua Davidson.*

† G. Bernard Shaw, Preface to *Androcles*, pp. viii, lviii, lxi, lxx, xcviii, c.

Christ's teaching, yet they are obviously one-sided and influenced by a desire to read something of the modern mind into the Christ of history. It is evident from the study of the Gospels that to Jesus the Kingdom of God meant a great deal more than social reform, however desirable in any given circumstances that may be. His emphasis was on personal spiritual regeneration much more than on social political reconstruction. He sought to establish a new religious and ethical community, a kingdom not of this world, involving the reign of God over the entire region of man's inner and outer life, rather than to bring about, in the first place, an upsetting of the social order or the redistribution of this world's goods.

Owing to totally different political conditions, Jesus did not in the least share, though doubtless He has to a large extent historically inspired, our twentieth century optimistic faith in progress, our belief in an earthly paradise or social utopia of material prosperity, to be reached gradually, in the course of secular evolution, by virtue of powers already inherent in human nature. This ideal has been well described as "a sort of Kingdom of God, but without a King and without a God—an awakening of man to all his wants ; a finding that these wants are all sublunar ; and a satisfying of all these sublunar wants by purely sublunar means." * Quite otherwise, Jesus proclaimed, to those who utterly despaired of the present world-order, an early and complete reversal of it, through the powerful intervention of a saving God. Such a kingdom, being

* F. von Hügel, *Eternal Life*, p. 311.

not political in character, could not possibly be set up by means of political machinery. It is true that Jesus regarded wealth as a great peril, and He found His best followers among the poor ; but that was because they who thirsted after God mostly belonged to the humbler classes. He firmly refused to be crowned king in a political sense or to fight the battles of the proletariat, and when the populace recognised that there was no prospect of His fulfilling their nationalist Messianic hopes, they followed no more after Him, but cheerfully consented to His crucifixion.

Even in personal and private cases it is remarkable how little disposed Jesus was to redress men's wrongs. When pressed to intervene in a property dispute, He refused, saying, "Who made me a judge or a divider over you ? Take heed and beware of covetousness, for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." It is as if Jesus regarded the ethical and spiritual aspect of all such questions as of vastly greater importance than the judicial or the economic. The prodigal son got his rightful share of personal property, but what did he do with it ? He straightway wasted it among boon companions, and in a far country forgot his father's love.

Christ's influence on political and economic matters was indirect and slow, rather than direct and immediate ; but it was none the less powerful on that account. He gave His sanction to no one kind of constitutional fabric more than to another, and He cannot be quoted in exclusive support of either Tolstoyan individualism or Marxian Socialism.

Everything depends, with Him, upon motive and aim and spirit. Jesus laid down principles, He did not propose programmes or offer panaceas. He was prophet, saint, saviour, rather than statesman, lawgiver, administrator. He was a poetic idealist with a vision, more than a practical reformer with a plan. If He had chiefly concerned Himself with social and economic problems, however important, He could not have been the world's Redeemer. Jesus looked on these questions, as He did every other, in a religious light, being mostly concerned with their bearing on the soul and its relationship to God ; and there were times when He preferred love's generosity in breaking an alabaster box of precious ointment over the Master's feet, to the distribution of an equal amount of wealth in almsgiving among the poor.

This general point of view, like the former, may be illustrated by a typical quotation. "Many people doubt," says Coventry Patmore, "whether Christianity has done much, or even anything, for the 'progress' of the human race as a race ; and there is more to be said in defence of such doubt than most good people suppose. . . . As to the question of the real failure or success of Christianity, that must be settled by considering the purpose of its Founder. Did He come into the world, live and die, for 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number,' as that is commonly understood, and as it constitutes the end of civil government ? Was it His main purpose, or any part of His purpose, that everybody should have plenty to eat and drink, comfortable houses, and not too much to do ? . . . Did He

expect or prophesy any great and general amelioration of the world, material or moral, from His coming? If not, then it cannot be said that Christianity has failed because these and other like things have not come of it. In these days all truth is shocking; and it is to be feared that the majority of good people may feel shocked by the denial, even in His own words, that such ends had anything more than an accidental part in His purpose or expectation. . . . His mission is most clearly declared to be wholly individual, and wholly unconcerned with the temporal good of the individual, except in so far as 'faith hath the promise of this life also.' . . . St. Teresa, if I remember rightly, declares that more good is done by one minute of reciprocal contemplative communion of love with God than by the founding of fifty hospitals or of fifty churches." *

III

When all this has been said, however, and it is frankly admitted that Jesus was not primarily interested in the "salvaging of civilisation," it remains true that His spiritual teaching has profound and far-reaching social implications. No hard and fast line can be drawn between the sphere of religion and the spheres of ethics, politics, and economics. Personal faith in Christ *must* find social and brotherly expression, or it is a thing of naught. Nay, more, the spiritual teaching of Jesus, if acted upon to-day, would revolutionise society from top to bottom, and we can only reconcile ourselves to its very gradual adoption by recognising that while

* C. Patmore, *Religio Poetæ*, chap. viii.

it is revolutionary in principle it is evolutionary in method. In reality, Jesus enunciated only one social principle, that we should love our neighbour as we love ourselves, in practical fulfilment of our love of God. That is to say, our religiously filial and vertical relationship of love and our ethically fraternal or horizontal relationship must be perfected together. When it is recognised that this goes infinitely beyond bare justice, in our dealings with our fellows, it will be admitted that no other principle of social reconstruction is required. Yet how many of us are prepared to act upon it? How much disturbance of our ingrained self-love it involves! Max Müller went to the root of the whole matter when he wrote: "Would not the carrying out of one single commandment of Christ, 'Love one another,' change the whole aspect of this world, and sweep away prisons and workhouses, and envying and strife, and all the strongholds of the devil?" *

From this principle one or two corollaries may be deduced. To begin with, we recognise that, if the Kingdom is to come, *an inward is more important than an outward change*. "Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or the tree corrupt, and its fruit corrupt." Personal regeneration must precede and condition all fruitful communal reconstruction. Man's natural perversity of sinful, unloving egoism will have to be restrained and overcome, if his environment is ever to be permanently improved. Even the most perfect schemes of wealth redistribution or political enfranchisement would suffer ship-

* *Life and Letters of F. Max Müller* (ed. by his wife), vol. i., p. 338.

wreck, should the heart remain selfish, or cruel, or avaricious. The characters of men mould their institutions much more than institutions may be counted upon to mould their characters. "Good governments, like clocks," says William Penn, "go from the motion you give them. Governments rather depend on men than men on governments. Let men be good and the government cannot be bad. If it be ill, they will cure it. But if the men be bad, let the government be never so good, they will endeavour to warp and spoil it to their turn. Though good laws do well, good men do better. For good laws may lack good men and be abolished or invaded by bad men. But good men will never lack good laws, nor suffer evil ones."

Another social corollary arising out of Christ's central principle is the *sacredness of personality*. Man is to be treated with respect and reverence because, even when most degraded, he is infinitely precious in the sight of God. He is the "brother for whom Christ died." All social institutions, therefore, must be tested and judged by their effect on moral personality. "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." It was this Christian affirmation of the inalienable spiritual worth and dignity of the human soul, rather than any direct attack upon unjust laws, that in the course of centuries undermined slavery, emancipated women and children, humanised and reformed criminal law. The application of this principle to our present industrial civilisation is very far from being complete. It implies, for one thing, a living wage, the provision of reasonable security against unemployment, ade-

quate opportunities for self-culture, and a certain level of decency and comfort as a necessary precondition of all spiritual well-being. Whatever in our economic system stunts personality, exhausts vitality, forbids leisure, or turns a human being into the cog of a machine, is condemned by Him who insists on the value of every soul in the sight of God, and who came that men might have life and have it more abundantly.

Another point of importance in Christ's social teaching is that He seeks to *influence the secular through the spiritual.* The method of Jesus in establishing the Kingdom was to gather round His person a redeemed society and set it the task of leavening the remainder of the community. "Ye are the salt of the earth, the light of the world." The Church, that is to say, in all social matters should give the lead to the State. It should exhibit in itself that ideal fraternity of love and justice to which the surrounding world-order should be made as far as possible to approximate. This means that, even in questions of politics and economics, the moral standards of the Church, as the advance guard of humanity, should be higher than those of the world. We should do more as Christians than other men do as citizens, or else the salt has completely lost its savour.

It is a reproach to the Church that it has frequently been content to uphold the established order, and delay reform, rather than devise new ways of embodying the principles of Christian love and brotherhood in man's social, industrial, and economic life. "The Church has strangely forgotten its function to establish a visible example of the King-

dom of God here and now." * Far too long it has been satisfied with preaching submission to the poor and philanthropy to the rich ; it has been more concerned, on the whole, that men should spend their money charitably than that they should earn it honestly. In many cases, indeed, the world's most necessary reforms have been resisted by none more fiercely than by members of Christian Churches.

The Conference on Politics, Economics, and Citizenship, however, recently held in Birmingham, clearly indicates that the Church is feeling the need of corporate penitence, communal and prayerful study, as well as co-operative experiment and organisation, in the discharge of its social mission. In all this we may be sure that Christ is working with it, and prepared to manifest His presence by signs following. He who saved the Church out of the wreckage of the Roman Empire, who brought it without harm through the upheaval and discord of the Reformation, who steered its frail bark through the stormy waters of the French Revolution and the still more perilous calms of the Age of Reason, is quite capable of equipping it to-day for the new and urgent task, perhaps the most difficult it has ever had to face, of reconstructing human society according to Christian principles.

IV

Beginning thus inwardly with the individual, and diffusing His spirit ever more widely through the family, the Church, the local community, and the

* C. Gore, *The Holy Spirit and the Church*, p. 285.

State, is there any likelihood, we ask, that Jesus will ever be able to leaven the whole lump? Will His mind and will ever succeed in dominating commercial morality, international politics, sex relationships? Certainly the outlook is not very encouraging at the present time. The claims of Christ's Gospel in regard to these matters is hardly realised as yet, much less generally responded to. "After nearly two thousand years' preaching of a religion of amity," wrote Herbert Spencer, "the religion of enmity remains predominant, and Europe is peopled by two hundred million pagans masquerading as Christians, who revile those who wish them to act on the principles they profess." * Indeed, the world's revolt from Christian ethics is almost as marked to-day as its rejection of Christian dogma. There are some who think that the principles of Jesus will never influence more than a fraction of human society. "As surely as the presence of high spiritual instincts in the human mind guarantees its indestructibility, so surely the deeply rooted prejudices which keep the majority on a lower level must prevent the Gospel of Christ from dominating mundane politics." † The idealism of Jesus, His refusal to compromise or lower His demands, would seem to suggest that He will be permanently thwarted, not so much by the wickedness, as by the apathy, the inveterate, dull stupidity of human nature. Innumerable social ills, as Mr. Galsworthy in his plays has clearly pointed out, are caused, not

* See *Life and Letters of Herbert Spencer* (ed. by D. Duncan), p. 400, and *Principles of Ethics*, vol. i, p. 323; vol. ii., p. 257.

† W. R. Inge, *Outspoken Essays* (First Series), p. 250.

by an evil will, but simply through lack of understanding sympathy and imagination.

There are others, however, who take a more hopeful view of the situation. Man is only at the beginning of his development, and already how far has he advanced ! His old haphazard and opportunist ethic is gradually giving place to a wider and more scientifically grounded survey of his responsibilities. Necessity, if not choice, is driving him to a Christian view of life. We think in terms of eugenics now, and a League of Nations, and our moral obligations to coming generations. Ours is an age, not merely of town-planning, but of world-planning. We dream of a social order in which all the legitimate interests of man will respect one another and combine in harmonious proportion. Indeed, the strengthening of man's creative and altruistic instincts at the expense of his merely acquisitive and egoistic instincts, which may be said to be the whole programme of Christianity in its social aspects, can be claimed as the natural and inevitable goal of the whole evolutionary process. " The ascent of man and of society is bound up henceforth with the conflict, the intensification, and the diffusion of the Struggle for the Life of Others. This is the Further Evolution, the page of history that lies before us, the closing act of the drama of Man. The struggle may be short or long ; but by all scientific analogy the result is sure." *

If this be so, then we may share with Meredith " the rapture of the forward view." The future is bright as the promises of God in Christ. Pessimists

* H. Drummond, *The Ascent of Man*, p. 443.

may deny that human nature can ever change. The answer is that already it *has* changed, in the proportionate strength of its various instincts, and that in any case it is likely to change much sooner than the redeeming love of God in Christ. What makes Jesus unique as a social regenerator is that, besides providing men with an unsurpassable ideal of what the Kingdom of God should be, He offers, in the love of Himself personally, an all-sufficient motive and new source of power in the attainment of that ideal. "Christianity reveals to men, in Christ, the absolutely perfect and therefore physically immortal personality. It promises mankind a perfect society built upon the pattern of this personality. And since such a society cannot be created by an external force (for in that case it would be imperfect), the promise of it sets a task before humanity as a whole and each man individually, to co-operate with the perfect personal power revealed to the world in so transforming the universe that it may become the embodiment of the Kingdom of God." * Only Christ is capable of accomplishing this result. By the love which He inspires He stimulates alike the personal and the social aspects of religion. "Inasmuch as ye did it unto the least of these My brethren, ye did it unto Me." This self-identification of Christ with the most needy members of the human family, and His demand that we should express our love to Him through them, provide the ultimate basis for all Christian brotherhood, and the most powerful motive for all redemptive service.

It may be that, since God has "set eternity in our

* V. Solovyof, *The Justification of the Good*, pp. 246–247.

hearts," the present temporal order will be found too narrow a stage for either the infinite aspirations of humanity or the infinite purposes of God in Christ. To quote the words of a once popular song, " It may be that only in heaven we shall hear that grand Amen." " The Kingdom of God and Nirvana," wrote the late Professor Troeltsch, " lie outside all history. In history itself there are only relative victories " (*Christian Thought*, p. 129). Yet though the ultimate goal of all human striving lies in the Beyond, in the degree to which an earthly kingdom of righteousness *can* be established, it will become possible only through the permeation of human society by the spirit of Jesus Christ. Nothing else is needed to bring about the state of things which Shelley, that passionate idealist and sincere Christian, dreamed of as he lay among the Euganean hills :

> And the love which heals all strife
> Circling, like the breath of life,
> All things in that sweet abode
> With its own mild brotherhood :
> They, not it would change ; and soon
> Every sprite beneath the moon
> Would repent its envy vain,
> And the world grow young again.

CHAPTER XI

THE CHRIST OF THE AGES

As we bring our long survey to a close, the question naturally arises in our mind, Is there anything permanent and abiding in the phases of the subject that have passed before us? We have seen that interpretations of Christ have astonishingly varied as His name has been passed from nation to nation and from century to century. Is there an element that is common to them all, or have new influxes and growths been introduced from time to time which have fundamentally altered the character of the original revelation and substituted something else? It is obvious that we can and must speak of the changing Church. Are we at liberty to speak of an unchanging Christ?

Our answer to this must be that throughout the ages the Church's *experience of* Christ has remained the same, however the expression and interpretation of that experience may vary. Before all else that experience may be defined as an experience of redemption. Jesus Christ, in all generations, and in whatever form He may have been presented, has brought to men deliverance from self, victory over the world, release from the guilt, the bondage, the pollution, and the power of sin, escape from all fleshly and creaturely limitations into the felicity of

life eternal, glad reconciliation with a God previously estranged and but faintly known, and peace and joy through filial fellowship with Him in a new creation. To souls that have been sad, sinful, and despairing, without God and without hope in the world, or that have been vainly endeavouring to find rest in a round of religious observances or good works, He has brought inner emancipation and the light of life. The typical Christian experience has never been better expressed than in the words of Paul : " Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear ; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father."

It may fairly be claimed that this experience of redemption has been central in Christianity through all transformations from the beginning until now. Peter's confession of the lordship of Jesus Christ as the Son of God was the rock on which the Church was originally built. It has remained the one foundation ever since, however diverse may have been the superstructures based thereon. The Church was early called upon to reflect on that formative experience, to utter it in creeds, to embody it in institutions, to express it in hymns and songs of joy, to explore both its metaphysical implications and its social applications, to translate it into practice, and especially to disseminate it vigorously in all directions. But the experience itself accompanied the Church throughout, causing it ever and again to revise its methods and restate even its Christologies, and compelling it from time to time to fashion everything afresh according to the pattern once shown it on the mount. There is nothing more wonderful in history

than this unbroken continuity of the Church's experience of its Saviour. In spite of the lapse of many centuries, we may still clasp in the embrace of faith to-day the Christ in whom the early disciples believed when with full purpose of heart they clave unto the Lord.

This continuity of experience points to a corresponding permanent continuity in the source from which it comes. Jesus Himself inspires and sustains the faith which He receives, and so fulfils His parting promise to the Church, "Lo, I am with you all the days, even unto the end of the world." As the ages of history follow one another, dogmas come and go, ecclesiastical institutions rise and fall, the rites and ceremonies of the Church flourish and decay, yet the crucified Artisan of Galilee, who has created these things, Himself lives on, greater by far than all He has inspired. He takes the philosophy of one generation, the science of another, the artistic genius or the social enthusiasm of a third, and presses them all into His service, only to transcend them still. No degradation of His teaching wholly obscures Him, no exposition of it does full justice to Him. Saints and martyrs, prophets and evangelists, the whole company of the redeemed, proclaim Him the King of Glory, and still He remains, endlessly fascinating, spiritually inexhaustible, wise with the wisdom of all the ages, and strong with the strength which only eternity can give. Behind all these manifestations, we say, there must be a personal identity in the Spirit, like the identity of a Self through all its changing phases from youth to age, or like the sameness in change of one of Bach's fugues, whose theme,

from its first announcement, goes on ever enriching and amplifying itself, until it reaches the climax of its colossal and resounding close.*

If this be the case, what can we finally say of Christ, except what the centurion said who witnessed His death upon the cross? "Truly this was the Son of God." It is not enough to say of Him that He was a religious genius who admits us to His own consciousness of the Father, or who confirms and illustrates truths which might well be arrived at apart from Him. It is necessary to go farther and say that in Christ God Himself acts, and acts in a unique way, to communicate Himself to man for the redemption of the world from sin and evil. Especially is that redemption centred in the Cross, where the love and holiness of God are perfectly revealed, only to be hidden from us again in the dazzling radiance of a light that is inaccessible and full of glory.

It is because of this that we may speak quite naturally of the *living* Christ. There is no need to go "back to Jesus." Christianity throughout the ages has always been in contact with a contemporary Lord and Saviour. We do not come into touch with Him by means of an ever-lengthening historical chain, of which it may be said that when one end is stirred the other vibrates.† Rather, His influence upon us is vertical, not horizontal. He is with us

* "Our highest Orpheus walked in Judea, eighteen hundred years ago; his sphere-melody, flowing in wild native tones, took captive the ravished souls of men; and, being of a truth sphere-melody, still flows and sounds, though now with a thousandfold accompaniments, and rich symphonies, through all our hearts; and modulates, and divinely leads them."—T. CARLYLE, *Sartor Resartus*, p. 182.

† See the beautiful tale by Tchehov, entitled *The Student*, in which this figure of speech is felicitously employed.

now. If, as Paul says, the Lord *is* the Spirit, then Christ is to be identified with every divine influence playing upon our lives to-day. That which confronts us when we read the Gospels is precisely the same as that which works in us when we are ashamed of sin, listen to the voice of conscience, or pray in humility to God the Father. What Paul, Augustine, Francis of Assisi, Luther, and John Wesley *had*, Jesus Christ *was* and *is* for evermore. Time does not age Him, though He survives so many centuries. He has the dew of youth because He is eternal.

From this also we may deduce the nature of His authority. This does not really rest upon such shaky foundations as the affirmations put forward in His name by an official Church, with its historical traditions. Neither does it depend upon the carefully elaborated proofs drawn by exegesis from the text of Scripture, or any apologetic based thereon. It does not even derive its ultimate sanction from Christ's own self-assertive claim to be the Lord of life and thought. Such claims might have been put forward by Him, as they have been by others, yet if the sheep had refused to recognise in them the voice of the true Shepherd, what value would they possess? Christ Himself was well content to rest His claims upon the response He evokes in those He came to save. His is the unchallengeable authority of one who "finds" us, because He was willing to die for us, and to whom we must respond as the human answers to the divine. "He that is of the truth heareth My voice." Even in remote islands of the sea, where the Church's historical prestige may be altogether lacking, and the text of Scripture

invested with no peculiar sanctity, Christ has only to be faithfully lifted up to draw all men unto Him. The *anima naturaliter Christiana* finds in Him alone its perfect peace. Christ's truth, that is to say, shines by its own light, and by the lustre of recognition it awakes in us. All other authorisation is subsidiary to this. "Now we believe, not because of thy saying; for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world."

Here, too, in Christ's power to satisfy man's fundamental thirst, his thirst for God, we have the fullest justification for Christian missions. The influence which Christ has exercised progressively, in His passage through the centuries, He can also exercise laterally, in the conquest of many nations. That same power which gave Him the victory over Zeus, Mithra, Osiris, Thor, and Balder, will enable Him also to subdue Vishnu and Buddha, and whatever weird gods now rule the remotest islands of the sea. It is not that He will destroy Confucianism, Hinduism, or Mohammedanism. Rather, He will supplement them, explain them to themselves, cherish their truths, slowly correct their errors, ripen their best hopes, renew their energies, sublimate and then fulfil their highest aspirations and ideals. Christ is already their Lord, though they know it not. Unconsciously they are seeking the truth as it is in Jesus, and must take their final place in His universal kingdom.*

* "Christianity possesses the highest claim to universality of all the religions, for this its claim is based upon the deepest foundation, the nature of God and man."—E. TROELTSCH, *Christian Thought*, p. 20.

What has been said so far suggests two closing reflections. In the first place, if all these things be true, what manner of persons ought we to be who profess to be His followers? The Church is the Body of Christ, the chosen agent and instrument of His purpose, for which He gave His blood, that He might "present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing." Should we not, then, give up belittling the Church and vilifying it, and seek rather to honour it before the world? In spite of innumerable defects, the Church has had a glorious and mighty past; what we all owe to it is incalculable; the record of its historical achievements should quicken and inspire us. Yet surely it is God's purpose to make it mightier yet—on one condition, that through penitence, faith, and loving self-sacrifice, we are genuinely and simply willing to take Christ seriously, and let Him have His way with us. What particular aspect of His person and work it is to be the privilege of this age to unfold only God Himself can determine. But, if we are ready to take advantage of it, an opportunity is presented to us to-day, as never before, to separate the Gospel of Christ from the accretions that have gathered round it in the course of history, to restate its essential significance in terms of modern need, and thus to set free its re-creative and redemptive power for the deliverance of mankind.

Finally, the revelation which is given to us in Christ carries with it the promise and potency of its own inevitable consummation. If the Cross means anything it means this, that by divine right of con-

quest the world belongs ultimately to redeeming love. What this fully signifies we cannot tell. The purposes of God in Christ are too sweeping, too comprehensive, too dependent on our intelligent co-operation, to be quickly or easily accomplished. They will require ages for their fulfilment, and their final crowning belongs not to time, but to eternity. It is enough for us to know that "all truths are shadows except the last," and that the last abides. When, in the fullness of time, Christ shall have assumed full authority and power, and shall have put all things underneath His feet, then shall He render the kingdom to the Father, that God may be all in all.

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